Summary of Major Points
February 10, 1999

- Congress created the Nuclear Waste Technical Review Board in the 1987 amendments to the Nuclear Waste Policy Act. The Board takes very seriously its role as the main source of *ongoing* technical and scientific review of the Department of Energy's (DOE) civilian radioactive waste management program.

- If phased development of an interim storage facility is authorized, the Board urges that sufficient resources are allocated so that the DOE can continue scientific testing to support decisions about the suitability and possible licensing of the Yucca Mountain site.

- The VA is a significant accomplishment that enables the DOE to identify and set priorities among key areas of research that could improve the technical basis for making decisions about site suitability, site recommendation, and licensing. However, the Board concurs with the DOE that the VA was not meant to be, and should not be, viewed as a decision about the suitability of the Yucca Mountain site.

- The Board believes that, in general, the scientific studies summarized in the VA were carried out in a manner that produced good scientific information.

- It is very hard to judge at this point how realistic the "bottom-line" estimates of repository performance may be in the VA.

- Expert judgment should not be used as a substitute for data that can be obtained directly from site, laboratory, and other investigations.

- The Board believes that the Yucca Mountain site continues to merit study as the candidate site for a permanent high-level radioactive waste repository and that work should proceed to support a decision by the Secretary of Energy on whether the site is suitable. However, significant uncertainties remain about the performance of both the natural and the engineered barriers in a repository system.

- The Board is pleased to note that the research priorities presented in the VA are consistent with those identified in the Board's November 1998 report and that much of this work is already under way. Results of these scientific tests and engineering analyses could help address the uncertainties about the performance of the repository system.