

Blue Ribbon Commission Meeting

Remarks by Bobbie Paul, Georgia WAND

October 18, 2011 - updated October 31, 2011

Thank you for inviting me to speak today and respond to the Blue Ribbon Commission's Draft report dated July 29, 2011.

Welcome to Atlanta, Commissioner Ayers and Commissioner Bailey.

I speak on behalf of the Georgia WAND community which is concerned about:

- 1) a possible return to reprocessing
- 2) the threat of nuclear power expansion
- 3) the failure of our nation to find a safe and secure means of isolating irradiated high-level waste and returning it to a deep geological repository.

I'm glad that we agree on the pressing need to find a suitable burial ground for spent fuel and high-level nuclear waste. I recall that it was our Native ancestors who warned us about the power of uranium years ago saying that we should never take it out of the earth.

My name is Bobbie Paul and I serve as Executive Director of Georgia Women's Action for New Directions or Georgia WAND, the largest chapter of National WAND founded 30 years ago as Women's Action for Nuclear Disarmament. The original Atlanta based educational non-profit was incorporated in Georgia in 1984 and became a federally recognized 501 c 3 in 2006, now serving all of Georgia. Our volunteer board of directors oversees a professional staff of four including myself. Georgia WAND, a nationally recognized peace organization working for a nuclear weapons-free world, the political empowerment of women and environmental justice, communicates with about 3,200 people weekly and focuses on reducing militarism, violence and injustice in our community and in our country. We maintain international partnerships with colleagues in Great Britain, Russia, France, Germany, and Japan. Our website is www.gawand.org.

Georgia WAND has watch-dogged activities at the Savannah River Site (SRS) in neighboring South Carolina for almost twenty years. For the past 12 years, we have concentrated on getting to know and building lasting relationships with residents in rural and urban communities surrounding SRS and nuclear Plant Vogtle. Georgia WAND is an active member of the Alliance for Nuclear Accountability, a national network of grassroots organizations working to address issues of nuclear weapons production and waste clean-up.

Georgia WAND looks at issues through a lens that celebrates people, community, health, children, and a safe and secure working and home environment. We advocate for precaution and challenge the nuclear industry's reliance on risk assessment models that assure short term economic gain but which often lead to long term pain for residents in communities where nuclear facilities are sited. We understand that the REAL back end of the nuclear fuel cycle does not always lead us directly to the problematic spent nuclear fuel rods but to the people whose homes back up to these reactor sites some who are often afraid to speak of the terror they feel living in close proximity to reactors and the highly radioactive waste that accumulates at each site. How do you explain your fear of something that, ordinarily, you may not see, may not smell or touch? And which is able to release harmful ionizing radiation to turn healthy cells into cancer cells anywhere from five to 70 years. How does one person find the courage to speak up, ask questions, or find friends on nuclear issues living in a community that has been told that their town's livelihood depends on blind allegiance to the public utility and its parent company - the major contributor to the tax base? Perhaps, after six or seven of your relatives have died from unexplained cancers, or when speakers brought in by the Department of Energy (DOE) to lecture reactor community residents about how dying from heart disease should be of greater concern to them than dying from cancer is spewed once too often. Or, perhaps it is when a person of another race from across the river speaks up and tells the truth about her fears and her family's illnesses and the utility company's taking of her land. I know first hand that there are those times when people living in the shadow of these nuclear waste producing facilities suddenly see that he or she is not alone and gain the

courage to step forth begging for more information: “My people perish from the lack of knowledge.”

The people of Shell Bluff in Burke County were never told in the 1950s or 1960s that there might be harmful radioactive emissions coming from the newly constructed Savannah River Site (aka the ‘bomb plant ‘) located directly across the narrow Savannah River from their homes; the same could be said about not knowing that by accepting nuclear reactors into their communities they were also accepting nuclear waste, without their consent, that had no place to go. So, in 1987 and 1989, without consent, nuclear power waste began to be generated from two Plant Vogtle reactors located four miles as the crow flies from the church that centers this small rural community known as Shell Bluff. Our state’s other two nuclear reactors are located at Plant Hatch in Southeast Georgia where over 18 casks of waste sit on site outside the GE Mark I boiling water reactors, identical to the Fukushima models (they came on line in 1975 and 1977. This Georgia community was courted to house nuclear reactors in its big backyard and little did the people know that they were going to sit with radioactive parking lots of nuclear waste long beyond the operating decades of the nuclear plant.

It has become a national shame that we are still making nuclear waste knowing full well that we have no suitable disposal options. What were the nuclear pioneers thinking when they proposed the construction and placement of nuclear reactors next to life supporting waterways and rural farmland? Where was their clean-up plan, their disposal plan, their care for creation plan, any plan to deal with elements that would live hundreds of thousands of years? Had they not imagined the enormity of providing barriers or their inability to dispose of irradiated fuel?

I thank the Administration for realizing that this nuclear waste issue is enormous and worthy of a commission that is willing and eager to hear for all stakeholders.

Unfortunately, in Atlanta on October 18, the public is not as well represented on panels as the nuclear industry and those that do its bidding.

We are at a serious juncture and need all stakeholders represented. Past attempts to deal with the waste have gone nowhere. Those who have preceded us have failed. Now, we have got to get this right.

The question is: can we really keep to the honorable task of cleaning up and resist the allure of making yet one more nuclear mess? Can we isolate the waste issue and, hopefully, the waste itself, and stop punting the problem onto future generations and finally finish the job? Or will the nuclear industry keep flexing its economic muscle to make more deals to perpetuate a plutonium, economy and, in the process, give us more waste to manage?

Living with an ongoing Fukushima disaster, are we willing to risk the nuclear terror that could be caused from an earthquake happening here in this region where a 7.3 earthquake hit on September 1, 1886 causing \$5-\$6 million dollars in damages? That famous Charleston earthquake was the largest one to occur in the Southeast and was felt from Boston to Bermuda.

We wonder if Japan could happen here. The unthinkable happened in Japan. Out of the park, out of bounds, a perfect storm, but it could never happen here. Do we really believe that?

A fundamental dilemma outlined in the BRC draft report seems clear. Some minds on the Commission clearly see nuclear waste as a financial commodity that provides opportunities for research and development for more nuclear ventures such as reprocessing which would keep multiplying new nuclear waste streams and the movement of irradiated fuel to “consolidated interim storage facilities” while others recognize that the no solution 25-year problem is a management failure and a challenge that must be faced head on if we are to protect public health and safety.

I say take action immediately to secure everything that can possibly be secured. Learn the lessons of Fukushima. Thin out the stacking of the fuel rods in the cooling pools to avoid fires. Use a low density, open-frame arrangement within the pools to allow for air to circulate. Remove the rods that have been in the cooling pools for at least five

years, and immediately begin putting them into hardened on-site storage, commonly referred to as HOSS. Keeping the waste close to the reactor site and avoiding transportation is critical for safety. If the reactor site is unsuitable for placing fuel rods into hardened on-site storage which may be the case at Turkey Point in Florida due to sea level considerations, move the fuel only once to a more suitable site. Make sure that hardened on-site storage is retrievable and institute real-time monitoring to make sure that radiation releases are detected, should they occur.

This is an immediate action plan that can assure a concerned public, especially since Fukushima, that our government is taking strong measures to harden spent fuel and make it less vulnerable to fires, meltdowns or explosions and is keeping the health and safety of the people, not the corporations, in the forefront.

As we learned from Fukushima, we must take better care of the fuel rods since their radioactivity and explosive nature without cooling water is immense.

Although not without dangers, HOSS is an available technology that should be utilized at as many sites as possible and we encourage the Commission to promote this sensible alternative.

According to Principles for Safeguarding Nuclear Waste at Reactors signed by 170 local and national organizations (many of us here today) and submitted to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) for rule-making, HOSS must be designed for “resistance to severe attacks, such as a direct hit by high-explosive or deeply penetrating weapons and munitions or a direct hit by a large aircraft loaded with fuel or a small aircraft loaded with fuel and/or explosives, without major releases.” HOSS could be implemented for most of the nation’s spent fuel for \$7 billion - less than the cost of one new nuclear reactor at Plant Vogtle - according to Bob Alvarez, former DOE official and Senior Scholar at the Institute for Policy Studies. We also support using the Nuclear Waste Fund to support this initiative to begin instituting dry-cask storage on-site. In addition, placing the spent fuel - or most of the spent fuel - into hardened on site storage does not preclude moving it later on to a permanent deep geological repository or elsewhere and would increase eventual transportation safety.

We also heartily discourage the establishment of any consolidated interim storage facilities which could delay the primary need: the establishment of a scientifically based, federally regulated permanent isolation and disposal site. We agree with Dr. Arjun Makhijani's recommendation "to initiate a decade of scientific research on various combinations of the three elements of geologic isolation prior to any siting process directed at specific sites." These three elements are: 1) geology 2) engineered barriers and 3) the sealing system.

We are glad that the Commission supports developing a generic rather than a site-specific standard and supporting regulatory requirements and to do so before site selection is underway. This will build confidence among the public as long as one of the goals is to protect public health.

Again, we do not advocate for the construction of any consolidated interim storage facilities. Leave the waste in current interim storage situations since the BRC claims that these arrangements are currently safe. Do not transport waste unless absolutely necessary. Consolidated interim storage could be easily seen as an invitation to the nuclear industry to begin thinking about reprocessing. Don't do it! This is about clean up, not building up more waste streams to deal with, no matter what the financial allure. No new nuclear missions should be coming out of clean up. No more build ups. The task at hand is not to make more waste but to deal with the current waste that has accumulated. Reprocessing increases waste streams and has been reported to increase six times the volume of waste. Get us down to zero, if possible. Make it a campaign and the only option. Get the public behind you. No more new waste. We have enough to deal with now. I firmly believe that true clean-up will reveal an amazing and lucrative opportunity once it has been accomplished. This slow dance can bring everyone to the floor.

convince Congress and the US citizenry that nuclear is safe, cheap, and clean, an answer to global warming, a panacea for job creation, and the only sensible option if one does not want to suffer pollution from coal. We hope for a day when the private partnership between government officials and corporate entities will end the stream of lies about campaigns that cherry pick statements that ignore the enormous gains that

but we are not naive to believe that it can happen overnight or after a two-week encampment at Occupy Atlanta, Occupy Athens, Occupy Augusta, Occupy Savannah, Occupy Asheville, Occupy Columbia, Occupy Wall Street, or Occupy Southern Company. We advocate that our nation's budget is our nation's check book and that, as such, it reflects our national character. What we spend our money on magnifies who we are. With over 56 cents of every discretionary dollar going to the Pentagon we believe that change is in order, that spending \$700 billion in the next decade on nuclear weapons that we never intend on using is wrong headed, that forcing tax-payers and rate payers - in ANY economy - to subsidize private companies' profits to build new nuclear reactors with billions of federal funds on top of a steady stream of increasing nuclear construction costs for nuclear reactors that have not been certified for construction or operation is frankly - insane. And unethical. we, as a nation, can certainly do better.

With that in mind we have dedicated over 25 years to being watchdogs of the well-funded military industrial complex known as Savannah River Site , or as the local citizens refer to it - the bomb plant.

Understanding that nuclear waste is a complex and enormous issue facing our country as well as other countries we have focused our attention for the past 7-8 years on the threat of nuclear power expansion in a state where water resources are strained and drought prevails, the economy is crippling young people and old people alike, the promise of thriving nuclear reactor communities and a booming economy has been unfulfilled, and people are sick.