

Senator Jim DeMint's Statement
delivered to
The United States Blue Ribbon Commission on America's Nuclear Future
January 7, 2011
Augusta, GA

For the past six decades, South Carolina has played a vital role in ensuring a strong national nuclear posture through the invaluable work of countless individuals at the Savannah River Site. Our state has also been at the forefront of the commercial nuclear industry. The first reactor came on-line almost 40 years ago in Hartsville, and today, over half of the electricity generated in our state comes from seven nuclear reactors operating in South Carolina. I can say confidently that you will find few states in the nation with more community support for nuclear or that will be more affected by the policies that this Blue Ribbon Commission recommends.

I believe America's nuclear future stands at a crossroads today. Our country faces many issues regarding our nation's energy security, our environment, and the demands of our society. At times, balancing these issues can be precarious at best. However, it is not impossible and done properly, it will provide a better quality of life, increased energy security, and strengthened competitiveness in the global marketplace. The Savannah River Site is a testimony to our ability to confront and balance these challenges successfully, and we as a local community, a state, and a nation are stronger and more secure because of the work done here.

One of the best opportunities that we have to increase our energy security is through new, domestic nuclear power. But one crucial issue must be addressed- nuclear waste, which is of course why this distinguished Commission is here today.

For the record, I strongly believe that our nation needs a permanent repository for spent fuel, and I believe that that permanent repository should be at Yucca Mountain. Yucca Mountain is a vital component of America's energy security, and the refusal of a few has halted decades of progress and billions in funding for – what has been determined by endless studies and scientific research – to be an environmentally safe and secure facility. Without a final destination for our nation's nuclear waste, I fear that our nuclear industry will never reach its full potential, costing Americans well-paying, permanent jobs and a secure energy future.

Opening a nuclear waste repository is also essential to ensuring that the 51 one-million gallons of defense waste currently housed at the Savannah River Site will be removed and permanently stored in a safe and secure location. SRS was never meant to be a permanent – or a *de facto* – home to our nation’s defense waste, and I will continue to work with my Georgia and South Carolina colleagues to ensure that this does not become the case.

Additionally, I think it is important to remember that when South Carolina agreed to take in special nuclear materials from sites across the nation at SRS as part of clean-up efforts, we received a guarantee that these materials would be processed through MOX and H-Canyon, ensuring a disposition path out of the state. Maintaining the operability of H-Canyon is key to this plan, and I hope the Commission will keep this important fact in mind when developing their final recommendations.

While I believe first and foremost that the Yucca Mountain repository should open, I am also confident that South Carolina and the Savannah River Site can play an active and important role in managing the back end of the nuclear fuel cycle through recycling. Because of SRS’s long history with the nuclear arsenal, the clean-up mission that is ongoing there, and the operation of H-Canyon, the Site has an unparalleled level of knowledge and expertise that should be tapped to develop solutions for America’s nuclear waste. I would urge the Commission to fully explore the possibilities available in dealing with our nation’s waste, including nuclear recycling, and to look to SRS, and the Savannah River National Lab at the Site, to help lead the way on this important work.

Again, I appreciate you being here today and hope your visit to the CSRA is a productive one. I look forward to working alongside you and with my colleagues in Congress to develop responsible, long-term answers to America’s Nuclear Future.

Thank you again for your time and your careful consideration of these critical issues.