

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 7, 2011

Dear Blue Ribbon Commission Members:

We apologize that we cannot be there in person today, but we appreciate the opportunity to offer our views on managing the back end of the nuclear fuel cycle and to provide recommendations for developing a safe, long-term solution to managing the Nation's used nuclear fuel and nuclear waste.

We have long advocated that the Department of Energy (DOE) immediately halt all actions to dismantle operations at Yucca Mountain. As you know, the Nuclear Waste Policy Act designated Yucca Mountain as the only candidate site for the national repository. Congressional intent is clear, and the Congress has voted several times to retain Yucca Mountain as the national repository. We are deeply disappointed that DOE has overstepped its bounds and has ignored congressional intent without peer review or proper scientific documentation in its actions regarding Yucca Mountain.

We believe the DOE must recognize the letter and spirit of the law and halt all efforts to reprogram funds or terminate contracts related to Yucca Mountain. Many currently existing nuclear wastes are stored in temporary facilities, and a timely repository decision is necessary to minimize costs associated with managing existing wastes.

Given that adequate supplies of affordable and reliable energy are critical to our nation's economy and security, we believe that nuclear energy is and must continue to be an essential part of America's energy portfolio. The decisions this Commission is chartered to make are critical if nuclear energy is to fully support our nation's energy future.

The needs for disposal of defense high-level radioactive waste are significantly different. They also are equally important as the needs of commercial used fuel. As you know, defense waste does not currently have treatment options which minimize materials requiring disposal in a geologic repository. This could change with a national investment in re-processing. Our constituents in the Central Savannah River Area (CSRA) have always been very supportive of the mission at Savannah River Site (SRS). We believe it is imperative that this Commission address a timely pathway for disposal of SRS defense high level wastes.

Technology currently exists to recycle used commercial nuclear reactor fuels. Our allies across the globe are doing this. Development efforts have identified several alternate used fuel recycling processes which reduce the amounts and toxicity of waste requiring disposal in a geologic repository and address nuclear non-proliferation concerns. We believe that the Commission's report must include a recommendation for a technology and engineering development program to develop and deploy the 'next generation' fuel cycle program. Such a


program would minimize the need for geologic disposal of waste products. SRS is a leader in this area, and currently recycles some materials from research reactors.

As you have seen, SRS is the ideal place to develop and demonstrate the new technology components of advanced Small Modular Reactors (SMRs) and offers benefits to the CSRA and America in the way of direct job creation, indirect job creation, development of manufacturing capabilities, export of U.S. goods and services, benefits to national security and energy policy, and reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. A recent study by the American Council on Global Nuclear Competitiveness underscored that the development of a robust domestic SMR industry will result in significant economic benefits.

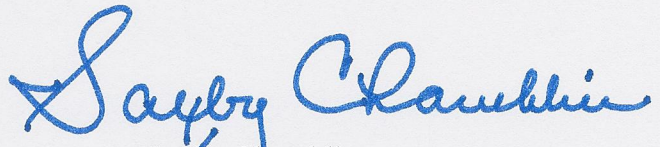
Any recommendation by the Commission on policies for managing the back end of the nuclear fuel cycle must include the many parameters which will enable success in this endeavor. SRS and the CSRA demonstrate a number of these elements of success. We reside in a region where energy demand is growing faster than other parts of the country. We are a hub of transportation. Our government leaders on the federal, state, and local levels speak as one voice when advocating for increased missions at SRS and recognize the need to preserve our national security, improve our energy security, and continue our environmental stewardship. Finally, and most importantly, our constituents understand nuclear power, its importance, and its potential and value, and for over 50 years have been advocating for it.

We appreciate the opportunity to share our views with the Commission, and apologize that we could not be there in person. As the Commission finalizes its recommendations, we stand ready to meet with or assist you in any way.

Sincerely,



Johnny Isakson
United States Senate



Saxby Chambliss
United States Senate