

Remarks by U.S. Rep. Wilson (SC-02)
Blue Ribbon Commission on America's Nuclear Future
January 7, 2011 Meeting
Augusta, GA

I welcome the Blue Ribbon Commission to the Central Savannah Region Area, and am encouraged by this opportunity for a regional dialog on the importance of a permanent national repository for high-level radioactive waste. I am hopeful it will be conducted in a constructive way and will help lead to more understanding of the consequences, both local and national, of the President's decision to withdraw the permit application for Yucca Mountain, not to mention throwing away over \$10 billion in investment and over 25 years of progress and work.

We all realize it is imperative for the United States to have a permanent storage and disposal facility. Spent nuclear fuel and high-level radioactive waste from nuclear power plants and defense facilities cannot be stored at existing sites indefinitely. The decision condemns storage of spent nuclear fuel and high-level wastes for the next 100 years at approximately 121 sites in 39 states. High-level nuclear waste from the U.S. nuclear weapons complex currently resides at 16 sites in 13 states, including Savannah River Site in South Carolina, and totals 7,000 metric tons. The waste will remain on the surface adjacent to rivers, lakes, and population centers for an indefinite period of time rather than in a deep geological repository at a remote, arid, Federally-controlled site. This is an extremely important matter not only for communities we represent and South Carolina, but for the nation as well.

In 1987, Congress amended the Nuclear Waste Policy Act (NPWA) to designate Yucca Mountain as the only authorized location, following procedures spelled out in the NPWA. If the President chooses to pursue an alternative site, the NPWA will have to be fully amended, all of which adds time and money associated with not moving the waste.

The termination of Yucca Mountain allows for full-breach actions, which brings potential liability for the government as high as \$50 billion. It will also trigger a new National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process as a "major federal action," costing time and additional millions in litigation.

The NEPA Environmental Impact Statements and Records of Decisions for defense waste will be affected, each one having to be redone or amended, condemning each to further costs, delays, and litigation.

Along with many others, including those I have the honor to represent, I feel these actions violate very specific responsibilities established by the Nuclear Waste Policy Act to make application to license Yucca Mountain. In fact, the decision to abandon Yucca Mountain without an alternative breaches legal agreements between the Department of Energy (DOE) and Idaho, South Carolina, and the State of Washington. Currently, South Carolina and Washington are suing DOE for violation of the NPWA, Administrative Procedure Act, NEPA, and Writ of Mandamus.

Indeed, the Yucca Environmental Impact Statement does not allow for no repository:

“It seems clear that development of acceptable means of disposal of wastes is sufficiently complex and of sufficiently broad national importance that coordination of research and development, construction, operation, and regulation at the Federal level is required and that the no-action alternative is unacceptable. Indeed, no-action alternative by the DOE could be construed as not permissible under the responsibility mandated to the Department by law.”

The Administration’s reversal on this critical issue leaves state and local leaders with more questions than answers. Will their community take on a permanent role as caretaker for our nation’s highly radioactive waste? This will no doubt lead to challenges with job creation, which is a priority for everyone.

If our nation is to be serious about clean energy emissions, and to reduce our dependence on foreign oil, then nuclear power must be a piece of the strategy. Without a safe and secure location like Yucca Mountain, nuclear energy development in America cannot progress. In South Carolina, nuclear energy provides over half of our electricity in South Carolina. It is a clean, safe, and cost-effective energy source. But in order to keep it safe, we must have a permanent site to dispose of it.

The challenge of the properly disposal and storage of nuclear waste touches every current and future citizen of America. It addresses their future public safety, energy security, and global competitiveness. I hope this Commission finds the political will to do what is right, and what must be done for the common good for our country.