

Testimony of Sen. Deborah Simpson, Maine State Senate and National Conference of State Legislatures High Level Waste Working Group

Commissioners Meserve, Bailey and Eisenhower, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. I am Deborah Simpson, member of the Maine state Senate and of the National Conference of State Legislatures High Level Waste Working Group. A few months ago you heard from my colleague, Delegate Sally Jameson on the work of NCSL and the issues facing Maryland and the nation regarding waste disposition and storage and the future of new reactors.

I am here today to speak to you about NCSL policy positions on these issues and the issues facing the state of Maine regarding interim storage of used fuel.

As you know, the Maine Yankee facility closed and was decommissioned starting in 1995. As of today, though the plant is fully decommissioned, the used fuel continues to be stored on site. This is a significant concern especially in light of the decision to stop forward progress on the licensing of Yucca Mountain as a geological repository.

We appreciate the work of the Blue Ribbon Commission and are encouraged by the thoughtful process you are undertaking. As you consider final recommendations we believe it is imperative that the federal government and industry work to develop one or more centralized interim used fuel storage facilities.

Of course state and local governments should have a role in site selection and such a facility should be licensed by the NRC and the first fuel moved to the interim facility should be from decommissioned plants.

The Nuclear Waste Fund should be used to support the facility through State and Community financial incentives and licensing and construction financing.

Legislation should be enacted instructing the federal government to lease space at the facility for interim storage of commercial used fuel and federal used fuel and high-level radioactive waste.

Moving ahead in this fashion will enable the federal government to, at least partially, fulfill its commitment to remove used nuclear fuel from commercial nuclear power plant sites. Additionally, this will enable the federal government to eliminate costly settlement payments due to its failure to meet its NWPA obligations. Further, a plan forward like this would allow decommissioned plant sites to be used for other, beneficial purposes.

Having an interim storage facility in place will also help demonstrate to the public and policymakers that a pathway to eventual disposition of used nuclear fuel is possible. Additionally, having an interim storage site will help demonstrate to the public and policymakers that routine safe transportation and central storage of used nuclear fuel is also possible.

Moving forward with an interim storage facility would also help to create a “breather” while public policy regarding used nuclear fuel recycling and ultimate disposal are resolved. Additionally, many believe that an interim storage facility could be used for studies, research and development in support of long-term storage of used fuel.

An interim storage facility would mean that nuclear power plants that have not implemented dry storage, would avoid such a need. And for nuclear power plants that have implemented dry storage, this facility would help with the expansion of such storage.

It is estimated that an interim storage facility could be built within 7-10 years and fuel moved accordingly.

As you are aware, NCSL has policy positions that support this path toward an interim storage facility. I have provided a copy of the applicable policy statements for your information. Again, I thank you for the opportunity to be here before you today and would be happy to answer any questions.