Obama’s radioactive waste commission returns predictable recommendations
A guarded victory as commission rejects reprocessing - for now

Takoma Park, MD – Beyond Nuclear said today that President Obama’s Blue Ribbon Commission on Nuclear Waste’s draft report, released today, predictably failed to establish an arm’s length from the nuclear industry by promoting new reactor construction and old reactor relicensing in its recommendations for nuclear waste management. It also recommends “consolidated interim storage” of nuclear waste, viewed by Beyond Nuclear and others as a high security and safety threat and an unwelcome health and environmental risk to host communities. However, given the strong component of nuclear industry boosters on the commission panel, led by Energy Secretary, Stephen Chu, the commission’s rejection of reprocessing as a near-term waste solution was a welcome surprise.

“The seven recommendations dodge the central issue that unfettered nuclear waste generation will exponentially increase an already mismanaged atomic disaster foisted onto future generations,” said Kevin Kamps, Nuclear Waste Specialist for Beyond Nuclear. “While we must address the nuclear waste that is already here, the first and most responsible step has to begin with capping the threat past onto countless future generations without a single watt of benefit,” he said.

The report misguidedly seeks to disconnect the more fundamental problem of unfettered nuclear waste generation from the ultimate size of a nearly 70-year old mountain of nuclear waste still without a final scientifically accepted solution for 100,000 years to come. And, despite an apparent consensus not to embark on the reprocessing of current reactor waste, the commission still appears to support funding for research and development of reprocessing and acknowledges its potentially implementation down the road.

“The Commission’s recommendations for ‘consolidated interim storage’ for high-level radioactive waste at sites across the country reflects its extreme, pro-nuclear industry bias,” Kamps said in a prepared statement. Kamps was referring in particular to panel members John Rowe (Exelon Nuclear CEO and Chairman) Pete Domenici (former Republican U.S. Senator from New Mexico), and Richard Meserve (former U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission Chairman).

“It is both shocking and unacceptable that the BRC has not recommended any significant changes to better secure the tens of thousands of tons of vulnerable nuclear waste on-site storage in pools and closely congregated dry casks at reactor sites, despite high safety, security, and environmental risks,” said Kamps. Beyond Nuclear has consistently supported efforts for Hardened On-Site Storage (HOSS) of nuclear waste at reactor sites.
The transfer of U.S. high-level radioactive waste into hardened on-site storage as soon as possible would protect it against accidents, attacks, and environmental leakage for the decades it will inevitably remain at reactor sites. A consensus position on HOSS by a broad coalition of national, regional, and grassroots environmental groups representing every state in the country has been repeatedly communicated to, and ignored by, the BRC.

The Commission also recommends a resumption of a search for a permanent high level nuclear waste repository. Beyond Nuclear questions the Commission’s recommendation to site permanent nuclear dumps through local community consent to the exclusion of State veto and other potentially impacted communities.

“Manufacturing local consent, likely financially, as the basis for siting large geological repositories is ludicrous,” said Paul Gunter, Director of Reactor Oversight at Beyond Nuclear. “How does bribing one community to accept a nuclear dump provide consent for many more communities in multiple states that might get their drinking water from the same aquifer system?” he asked.

So-called ‘consolidated interim storage’ could easily turn into de facto permanent parking lot dumps. These have often been targeted at Native American reservations, a violation of environmental justice principles. It would launch a radioactive waste shell game onto our roads, rails, and waterways, unnecessarily doubling the risks of ‘Mobile Chernobyl’ severe accidents or ‘dirty bomb on wheels’ terrorist attacks by requiring yet another eventual transfer to permanent disposal sites.

Beyond Nuclear praises and thanks President Obama and Energy Secretary Chu for wisely cancelling the scientifically unsuitable radioactive waste dump targeted at Western Shoshone Indian land at Yucca Mountain, Nevada.

For more information, including links to environmental coalition statements in support of hardened on-site storage and opposed to parking lot dumps and reprocessing, see www.beyondnuclear.org.

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_Beyond Nuclear aims to educate and activate the public about the connections between nuclear power and nuclear weapons and the need to abandon both to safeguard our future. Beyond Nuclear advocates for an energy future that is sustainable, benign and democratic._