Opening Remarks by Kevin Kamps, Beyond Nuclear, at the U.S. House
Subcommittee on Environment and the Economy, Oct. 1, 2015

Thank you Chairman Shimkus, Ranking Member Tonko, and Members of the Subcommittee. My name is Kevin Kamps. I serve as Radioactive Waste Watchdog at Beyond Nuclear based in Takoma Park, MD.

Our country needs to avoid radioactive waste wrecks, both figurative – of policy – as well as literal, on our roads, rails, and waterways. We need to just say no to unwise irradiated nuclear fuel transport, storage, and disposal schemes, that have more to do with offloading nuclear utilities’ liabilities onto the public, than on protecting health, safety, and the environment.

Transporting HLRW by truck, train, and barge, through 45 states and the District of Columbia, to the unsuitable Yucca Mountain, Nevada site would take unnecessary risks, and violate consent-based and environmental justice principles. Yucca is the worst site ever studied for HLRW waste disposal. It has been kept alive by “double standard standards”: when Yucca can’t meet the standards, they are either weakened or gotten rid of. Yucca is an earthquake and volcanic zone. If RW is ever buried there, it will leak massively into the groundwater, creating a large nuclear sacrifice zone downstream. Nevada has not consented to being railroaded into becoming this country’s RW dump. The Western Shoshone Indian Nation, who live downstream, have accused federal officials of environmental racism.

Consolidated interim storage also makes no sense. Take Private Fuel Storage, targeted at the Skull Valley Goshutes Indian Reservation in UT. If that de facto
permanent parking lot dump had opened, and imported 4,000 casks of HLRW, they would have been “returned to sender” when Yucca was cancelled. 50 casks from ME would have travelled 5,000 miles round-trip, for nothing.

HLRW shipments are potential Mobile Chernobyls. Risks include long-lasting, high-temperature fires, as NAS acknowledged in 2006, which could breach shipping containers and release disastrous amounts of hazardous radioactivity in heavily populated areas.

Barge shipments – on the Great Lakes, CA’s Pacific coast, the waters of NJ, NY, and CT, and numerous other rivers, and sea coasts – are potential Floating Fukushima, risking radioactive contamination of vital drinking water supplies and the food chain, and even deadly nuclear criticality accidents if submerged.

A quality assurance meltdown in industry and at NRC, revealed by whistleblowers and accidents, adds to the risks of shipments, calling into question -- as but one example -- Holtec casks’ structural integrity sitting still, let alone travelling 60mph or faster on the rails.

NAS also emphasized that risks of terrorist attack on shipments need to be addressed. A 1998 test of a TOW anti-tank missile on a HLRW shipping container conducted at the U.S. Army’s Aberdeen Proving Ground showed that casks are potential dirty bombs on wheels. Combined with an incendiary, such breaches could cause a large-scale radioactivity release.

Incredibly, DOE is throwing caution to the wind, proposing unprecedented LIQUID HLRW truck shipments from Chalk River, ON to Savannah River, SC, with little to no Environmental Assessment.
Even after the BRC heard many calls for EJ, it nonetheless kept Native American communities on the target list for centralized interim storage. But as Keith Lewis of the Serpent River First Nation put it, “There is nothing moral about tempting a starving man with money.” As President Obama honored Grace Thorpe for helping 60 Native communities fend off DOE’s parking lot dumps, such radioactive racism must stop.

Through sheer luck, the Los Alamos barrel that burst in the WIPP underground did not do so while being shipped, or astronomically costly and hazardous radioactive releases to the environment, and worker or public alpha inhalation doses, could have been much worse.

Waste Control Specialists, TX, a lead contender for a parking lot dump, hastily hosted similar, potentially explosive barrels in the open air – which could put not only the Ogallala Aquifer at risk, but also the HLRW storage targeted at the site.

Savannah River Site, and Dresden nuclear power plant in IL, are also inappropriate targets for parking lot dumps, as they are already heavily burdened by radioactive contamination and large-scale RW storage.

So if Yucca and parking lot dumps are bad ideas, what are some solutions? We should phase out nuclear power, stop the generation of HLRW, and replace the electricity and jobs with renewables and efficiency.

For the HLRW that already exists, 200 groups representing all 50 states have been advocating HOSS for well over a decade. Vulnerable pools need to be emptied into quality dry casks that are built to last, safeguarded against accidents and natural disasters, and fortified against attacks.