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High-Level Nuclear Waste
Policy and Review Board Meeting
September 16, 1983, 1:30 p.m.
Hearings Room, Building 4, Rowsix

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Minutes

Sue Gould, Board Chair, opened the meeting.

Sue Gould introduced Stuart Elway of Communication Design, who is under contract to develop a survey to assist in the development of the public information program. Mr. Elway presented an outline version of proposed questions to be used in the telephone survey which is planned to cover a random sample of 600 people throughout the state.

Working with a subcommittee of the Advisory Council, 35 questions were developed which were distributed to the Board members and discussed at length. Questions concerned the order of the proposed questions, clarification of "Nuclear Power" versus "Nuclear Waste," "Defense Waste" versus "Commercial Waste," and the general purpose of the survey.

It was pointed out this survey would be useful for citizens to gain a better understanding of the fact that this country is creating nuclear waste with no permanent disposal facilities yet available, and citizens have a responsibility to assist in developing a solution to a national problem; thus their awareness is essential. Therefore, the purpose of this survey is not only to find out how citizens are thinking, but to help to educate them. This effort will provide needed information in the preparation of a comprehensive public information program.

Following discussion, Mr. Elway stated that a revised draft of the proposed questionnaire will be ready early next week and will be available to the Board members. In the meantime, he planned to do a small "test" survey over the weekend.

The Board was asked to submit any further comment or suggestions to the Office of Nuclear Waste Management, or directly to Warren Bishop, Chair of the subcommittee.

Bill Meyer of the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) was introduced by Sue Gould.

Mr. Meyer gave a brief history of the Geological Survey's past involvement in the Pasco Basin and its evaluation of the U.S. Department of Energy's (USDOE) efforts to explore the Hanford site as a potential repository.

Current studies are being undertaken in the Washington-Oregon area by a task force of Rockwell, Pacific Northwest Laboratories, and the USGS.

Results of the task force study are contained in the USGS letter to Robert L. Morgan of USDOE. Each member of the Board was provided with a copy of this letter prior to the meeting.

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Extensive discussion followed Mr. Meyer's presentation focusing on the consensus of scientific experts in response to the earlier criticism of the data and interpretation found in the USDOE/Rockwell Characterization Report and draft Environmental Assessment. Mr. Meyer believed there was a general consensus, but a scarcity of data, on the deeper areas.

There was also great concern expressed about the time frame. The federal act requires a decision by the President by 1987 for the designation of a high-level nuclear waste repository. Based on the magnitude of the problem of studying a changing flow system, water levels, sodium content, etc., there is no absolute nor quick answer. All avenues are being explored -- all branches of science are trying to come up with an adequate answer. Mr. Meyer repeated, "science dictates the pace of efforts, not politics."

The general consensus, after lengthy discussion, is that the specified time frame cannot be met, and there may be a need by the Board to communicate with Congress, pointing out the nature of the timing problem.

Representative Nelson pointed out that sites without adequate data can be ruled out as repositories. If there are no acceptable sites, then Congress will have to deal with that eventuality.

Mr. Meyer said meetings are planned in October with USGS, NRC, and USDOE to discuss a range of time frames that would be adequate. Mr. Meyer indicated that sufficient data does not now exist to set a time frame and, at this time, enough data is not available to evaluate the site.

USGS will funnel further information through the Task Force, for review and comment by the Policy and Review Board. The Federal Task Force was created to try to resolve any differences, and the USGS probably will publish additional analysis on the subject within the calendar year. Future meetings are planned and they will keep the Policy and Review Board informed.

Mr. Meyer was thanked for his presentation and indicated he would be glad to return at a future time.

David Stevens reported on the status of the grant application to USDOE for fiscal year 1984. He said the draft application was submitted to the manager in Richland on September 12. It presented what the Nuclear Waste Management Office had in mind, based on USDOE's plans and activities. USDOE is looking at pushing back the date for completion of some of their activities. The sum of \$940,000 has been requested for the fiscal year, which will cover staffing, public information programs, subcontracts with other agencies, and all allied areas. Some response should come in a week or ten days. Mr. Stevens indicated to USDOE that a decision was necessary soon for program continuity.

Representative Nelson stated that a grant process was being planned by the Legislature. They have retained Laird Harris, Consultant, to develop a grant application and the Legislative Committee is working on its provision.

Don Provost reported on the Department of Ecology's program schedules. USDOE continues to work on the guidelines for the repository program. A revised draft is expected to be available next week. The final adoption may come shortly after the first of the year.

The required Environmental Assessment is now scheduled for completion in July 1984.

Site Characterization Report completion has been moved back to July 1985.

Sue Gould introduced Mr. Jim Voss of Golder Associates, who gave a report on the Issue File Project. He distributed material explaining the development of the Basalt Waste Isolation Project Technical Issues File, background, technical issues, and logic of the work.

Senator Williams indicated that the state's investigation is a unique new process with state, federal, and legislative involvement. Some legislative members are concerned about the contract. There may need to be legislators serving on the negotiating team for the consultation and cooperation agreement to look at legislative participation in the final document. Conceivably there may be some resistance from the Legislature. Even though there is legislative staff representation on the team, the Legislature may want to sign off.

Representative Nelson raised the question of who should sign on behalf of the Legislature - perhaps the Speaker of the House and the President of the Senate? Sue Gould suggested a meeting with the legislative leadership on the question. Representative Nelson replied that the Legislature needs clarification, the Board needs clarification, and there is a need for resolution. Sue Gould responded by saying that we are at an early stage in this effort, and it is to the state's best interest to have the first signed agreement.

Senator Williams pointed out some minor discrepancies in the minutes of the August 12 Board meeting, and the Secretary was instructed to correct the minutes.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:15 p.m.