LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF SOUTH CAROLINA STATEMENT OF CONCERN

NRC PUBLIC MEETING ON A POTENTIAL RULEMAKING FOR SPENT NUCLEAR FUEL REPROCESSING FACILITIES

JUNE 21, 2011

THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF SOUTH CAROLINA
PO Box 8453, Columbia, SC, 29202, (803) 251-2726, www.lwvsc.org

We appreciate this opportunity to address issues which have concerned us for years - I am speaking for the League of Women Voters of South Carolina. My name is Suzanne Rhodes, and I shall briefly address two issues today.

The first is commercial spent fuel reprocessing. If there is a role for commercial reprocessing, it is many decades away.

The French wish to develop and build a reprocessing facility in the United States. Our country's taxpayers would underwrite the French project, and taxpayers have other priorities. There is no need for the NRC to accommodate French dreams at this time.

According to the Government Accounting Office, commercial spent fuel reprocessing appears more expensive than the resulting product is worth. Also, according to GAO, reprocessing does not solve the waste problem. Japan's experience with reprocessing, as presented to the Blue Ribbon Committee last February, supports GAO. (GAO-11-229 & -230; 92-83, 10-48)

The second issue of concern is the Mixed Oxide program. The LWV of the United States is very much in favor of most anti-proliferation projects. However Dr. Mary Kelly, representing LWV SC, initially opposed MOX fuel fabrication in favor of mixing wastes with other SRS wastes to remove the potential for misuse. The MOX program was pursued, and we have learned a lot.

The price tag for this most expensive project has escalated. Another redesign is necessary if the program is to proceed. The commercial nuclear power industry has expressed little or no interest in using the product. Finally, the safe management of plutonium onsite has been criticized. It is not only cheaper, but also safer, to simply treat the materials to make them ineffective.

Finally, the NRC and DOE and the nuclear community have huge challenges right now. Those responsibilities include new issues of management and operation at reactors, as well as at spent fuel facilities. Those responsibilities also include new interim waste management issues and - hopefully - a limited number of Hardened On-Site Storage designs. There is also a range of repository issues.

There is no need to consider new futuristic and expensive technical and financial challenges. Reprocessing and mixed oxide fuel experiments have failed the first tests. It is essential that we acknowledge our experiences. We need to resolve immediate challenges. Thank you.

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. Membership in the League is open to men and women of all ages.