



UNITED STATES
NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20555-0001

October 15, 2010

The Honorable Jim Sensenbrenner
Ranking Member, Select Committee on
Energy Independence and Global Warming
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Sensenbrenner:

This is to acknowledge receipt of your letter dated October 13, 2010, regarding the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission's review of the Department of Energy's license application for the nuclear waste repository at Yucca Mountain.

Please be assured that we are working on a response that will be forwarded to you as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rebecca Schmidt".

Rebecca L. Schmidt, Director
Office of Congressional Affairs

AIF



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NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
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October 15, 2010

The Honorable Ralph M. Hall
Ranking Member, Science and Technology
Committee
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Hall:

This is to acknowledge receipt of your letter dated October 13, 2010, regarding the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission's review of the Department of Energy's license application for the nuclear waste repository at Yucca Mountain.

Please be assured that we are working on a response that will be forwarded to you as soon as possible.

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Rebecca L. Schmidt, Director
Office of Congressional Affairs

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

October 13, 2010

Chairman Gregory Jaczko
Nuclear Regulatory Commission
11555 Rockville Pike
Rockville, MD 20852

Dear Chairman Jaczko:

We are writing to express our concern regarding reports that you are unilaterally halting the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's (NRC) review of the Department of Energy's (DOE) license application for the nuclear waste repository at Yucca Mountain.

Recent media reports assert that you directed NRC staff to begin terminating review of DOE's license application, consistent with the language of the Fiscal Year 2011 (FY11) budget request, despite the fact that Congress has yet to approve the FY11 budget.¹ This action has been justified in a guidance memo which argues, "the [continuing resolution] legislation does not include specific restrictions on spending funds. Therefore, the staff should continue its activities on the Yucca Mountain license application in accordance with the Commission's decisions on the FY 2011 budget..."² However, basing funding and operational decisions on submitted budget requests, not appropriations bills signed into law, is suspect. Even the NRC spokesman, David McIntyre, noted that he was "not sure whether there was a precedent for [your] decision."³

Your directive is even more alarming given the current status of the license application. As you know, the Atomic Safety and Licensing Board (ASLB) rejected DOE's motion to withdraw the license application on June 29, 2010. According to the ASLB, DOE lacks the authority to overrule clear Congressional intent for NRC to review the license application of Yucca Mountain as a nuclear waste repository. As you know, Congress passed the Nuclear Waste Policy Act of 1982 (NWPA) to centralize the long-term management of nuclear waste, including construction of a safe and permanent nuclear waste repository. In 1987, Congress amended the NWPA by designating Yucca Mountain as the only option for a longer-term storage site by a vote of 237-181 in the House of Representatives and 61-28 in the Senate. Congress reaffirmed Yucca Mountain's designation as the only option for a long-term storage site in 2002 by a vote of 306-117 in the House of Representatives and 60-39 in the Senate. Again in 2007, the House of Representatives overwhelmingly rejected, by a vote of 80-351, an attempt to eliminate funding for the Yucca Mountain nuclear waste disposal program. Additionally, on July 6, 2010, 91 Members of Congress sent DOE a letter expressing concern with their decision to immediately close Yucca Mountain.

The commissioners have not yet issued a ruling on appeal; therefore, unless the commission overturns the ASLB decision, the NRC must consider the license application. Your unilateral

¹ <http://www.ivri.com/news/nrc-chairman-directs-stoppage-of-yucca-review-104456878.html>

² U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, "Guidance Under a Fiscal Year 2011 Continuing Resolution." October 4, 2010.

³ <http://www.enr.com/news/2010/10/07/100710>

Chairman Jaczko
October 13, 2010
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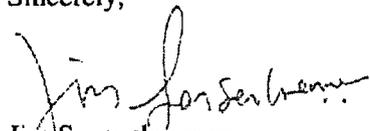
decision silences the opinions of the other commissioners on the pending appeal. Further, legal challenges in federal court are imminent, pending final action from the NRC. Your directive gives the appearance of coordinated action between you and DOE, which suggests an additional level of impropriety.

In light of the reports, we request answers to the following questions:

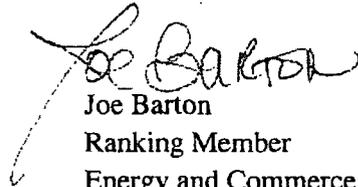
1. On what legal authority are you grounding your decision to terminate review of the license application based on a budget request, rather than existing law?
2. What specific actions have been taken or will be taken to terminate review of the license application, including all actions related to NRC staff review of the application?
3. How does halting NRC review of the license application influence the pending appeal of ASLB's ruling?
4. How will your decision impact future legal challenges to DOE's motion to withdraw?
5. How are you ensuring that NRC is prepared to resume consideration of the license application if the commission and courts uphold ASLB's decision?
6. What communication specifically relating to this decision have you had with the offices of Secretary of Energy Chu, Senate Majority Leader Reid, or the White House?

Please respond by October 27, 2010. We appreciate your cooperation.

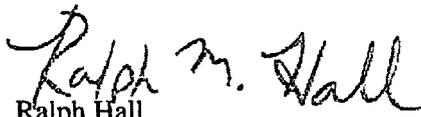
Sincerely,



Jim Sensenbrenner
Ranking Member
Select Committee on Energy Independence and
Global Warming



Joe Barton
Ranking Member
Energy and Commerce Committee



Ralph Hall
Ranking Member
Science and Technology Committee



Doc Hastings
Ranking Member
Natural Resources Committee