

OPENING STATEMENT

**The Honorable Ralph M. Hall (R-TX), Chairman
U.S. House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology**

*Assessing America's Nuclear Future – A Review of the Blue Ribbon Commission's
Report to the Secretary of Energy*

February 8, 2012

I want to welcome everyone here for today's hearing, "*Assessing America's Nuclear Future – A Review of the Blue Ribbon Commission's Report to the Secretary of Energy.*"

This morning we will hear from two distinguished members of the Blue Ribbon Commission on America's Nuclear Future: former National Security Advisor and Lieutenant General Brent Scowcroft, and former Chairman of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Richard Meserve. General Scowcroft and Chairman Meserve will provide an overview of the BRC's key recommendations to manage this nation's nuclear waste.

We also will hear from the Department of Energy's Assistant Secretary for Nuclear Energy, Pete Lyons and hope that he will explain how the Administration plans to implement the Commission's recommendations and utilize its current nuclear energy research activities to find a permanent solution to the disposal of spent nuclear fuel.

Thirty years ago, I supported passage of the Nuclear Waste Policy Act of 1982. The law was intended to provide a solution to what America does with its spent nuclear fuel. While our understanding of how to handle and dispose of spent fuel has increased dramatically in the decades since, nuclear waste is managed exactly as it was in 1982—through onsite storage at the more than 100 reactors around the country. I hope I don't have to wait another thirty years to see the government finally meet its legal obligations.

Just as real progress was being made to construct a permanent repository at Yucca Mountain, Nevada, President Obama decided to change course just as he did with the space program without specifying any future path. In this case, he created a Blue Ribbon Commission to re-evaluate how our Nation manages the back end of the nuclear fuel cycle. In doing so, President Obama started the whole process over, throwing this country's nuclear waste management policy into disarray. When the Commission's draft report came out in July, I stated that it is time to stop playing politics and move forward with the Yucca Mountain project. I echo that sentiment today.

The President dismantled the Yucca Mountain program on which, to date, American taxpayers have spent over \$15 billion studying its scientific and technical viability to serve as a permanent geologic repository. Electricity consumers contribute approximately \$750 million into the Nuclear Waste Fund annually, and that fund now has a balance of \$27 billion. Recently, the

Obama Administration revised the Federal government's estimated liability for not accepting ownership of radioactive waste to almost \$21 billion, an increase of \$3.7 billion or 21 percent since creation of the Blue Ribbon Commission.

Despite this massive investment and decades of study, the Secretary of Energy explicitly prohibited the Blue Ribbon Commission from even considering the suitability of Yucca Mountain to serve as a portion of America's nuclear waste management policy – effectively tying the Commission's hands and thumbing his nose at Congress. Despite this objectionable action by the Administration, the Commission deserves credit for highlighting in its report that every expert panel has concluded that deep geologic disposal is the scientifically preferred approach.

Yucca Mountain is exactly that.

I am disappointed that the Commission was not able to even consider Yucca Mountain as part of its review, but I recognize that there are other recommendations by the Commission that could improve nuclear waste management policy. I look forward to hearing about those.

Thank you again for being here. I now recognize Ranking Member Johnson for five minutes.