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YORK COUNTY (SC) GREENS**

September 13, 2006

The Honorable David Hobson
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Eliminate Funding for SRS MOX Plant, Support Plutonium Immobilization

Dear Chairman Hobson:

We are writing to you to thank you for the decision by the Energy and Water Development Subcommittee which led the full House to eliminate funding for the plutonium (mixed oxide, MOX) fuel factory at the Department of Energy's (DOE) Savannah River Site (SRS) in South Carolina. For a host of cost, non-proliferation, and environmental reasons we fully support the decision to terminate the MOX program as a method to deal with surplus weapons plutonium. We also enthusiastically applaud the House's recognition that immobilization of plutonium as waste is the preferred disposition path.

We urge members of the House to insist on the House provision in the upcoming House-Senate conference committee. The MOX program is woefully over-budget and behind schedule and the U.S.-Russian agreement is at a stalemate on key issues, not the least of which is almost total lack of support financially from the G-8 which has not even addressed it on its agenda for the past several years running. We depend on your strong leadership now to achieve a sound and cost-effective approach to manage surplus plutonium.

As you are well aware, after more than a decade of large expenditures and fiscal mismanagement, the DOE's MOX program has produced minimal results. As the cost of the MOX plant has rapidly escalated to near \$4 billion, the Energy and Water Development Subcommittee's decision to cease funding the

MOX program will prevent costs from spiraling further out of control if construction of the MOX plant were to begin.

As has been confirmed by the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (DNFSB), the plutonium now stored in the old K-Reactor at SRS is too contaminated for use as MOX and must be immobilized in existing high-level waste. The subcommittee's substantial increase in funding for a revived plutonium immobilization program is timely and promises to yield positive results in disposing of surplus plutonium now stored at SRS, Hanford and other DOE sites.

The Russians have made it clear that they will not participate in a parallel program to use MOX in their light-water reactors (LWRs). Thus, the basis for the joint U.S.-Russian MOX program has collapsed. Along with termination of the MOX plant funding, we request that it be made very clear to DOE that construction of the MOX plant at SRS shall not go forward given that there is no longer a parallel program in Russia.

DOE is taking a new look at an "all-immobilization option." Immobilization yields positive environmental and non-proliferation benefits over the risky commercial plutonium fuel option because it involves less handling and processing of plutonium. It is obvious that immobilization would be much cheaper than the dual disposition track (MOX and immobilization) that DOE is now pursuing. At a recent House Armed Services hearing on plutonium, DOE presented unsubstantiated rough estimates for the cost of immobilization compared with the cost of a dual track. We request that Congress direct DOE to conduct an in-depth cost analysis, involving participation and review independent from DOE, on immobilization and all aspects of DOE's plutonium disposition program. An important dimension of this report must be to review the wisdom of two plutonium programs being managed by two artificially separated entities inside DOE - the Office of Environmental Management and the National Nuclear Security Administration.

As DOE has clearly not given up on MOX, however, we ask you to keep in mind there remain huge obstacles to success with the U.S.-Russia MOX program. In addition to the long-standing unresolved liability issues and the equally long-standing lack of G-8 support for financing Russia's MOX infrastructure, Russia simply does not have reactor capacity to burn MOX fuel. Although Russia has said it would use its BN-600 plutonium breeder reactor for plutonium disposition, that aging reactor has a maximum capacity to use only 4-5 metric tons of plutonium during its remaining life, far under the 34 metric tons in the original U.S.-Russia agreement. Now Russia wants outside funding to pay for construction of a massive new plutonium breeder reactor, the BN-800. That reactor simply does not exist and thus cannot satisfy the bilateral agreement. Further, the BN-800 can be operated in "breeding" mode to produce yet more weapons-grade plutonium for the Russian stockpile. Given the expense and the stark proliferation risk such a reactor poses, the U.S. must reject this option outright.

Thank you very much, again, for the significant step to terminate the MOX program.

Sincerely,

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