

STATE OF MICHIGAN
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
LANSING

JOHN ENGLER
GOVERNOR

JUN 13 2001

June 13, 2001

The Honorable Spencer Abraham
Secretary of Energy
1000 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20585

Dear Secretary Abraham:

Along the scenic shores of the Great Lakes states, there are thirteen nuclear power generating facilities, four of which are located in Michigan. Because America continues to lack a deep geologic repository, each of these facilities must store used nuclear fuel on-site, and because spent fuel pools are now full, many store this waste in large concrete casks within a few hundred meters of the lakes. The use of "dry cask" storage is the direct result of the federal government's failure to establish a single, safe, centralized storage area for the inevitable byproducts of nuclear power generation.

As Governor of the Great Lakes State, I urge you to consider the implications of continuing to store over 5,000 metric tons of used nuclear fuel, spread out in so many places, so close to the Great Lakes. The Great Lakes are a drinking water reservoir for 40 million people. Indeed, the plenty and purity of these sweet-water seas are the envy of the world. For the sake of these vast and vital resources, it is imperative that progress continues to be made towards concluding the evaluation of Yucca Mountain, Nevada.

Recall that the Nuclear Waste Policy Act anticipated the opening of a centralized federal repository for used nuclear fuel by 1998. Yet, even after over two decades and \$12 billion in consumer contributions (more than \$250 million from Michigan consumers), of which \$7 billion dollars was devoted to scientific studies, this statutory obligation remains years from satisfaction. The recently released Science and Engineering Report on Yucca Mountain reaffirms and further substantiates previous findings regarding the suitability of Yucca Mountain as a national disposal site for greater than Class C radioactive waste; it is the single most thoroughly analyzed piece of real estate on the planet. The science is clear: Yucca Mountain is safe, secure, and suitable.

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At a time when there is growing global concern about the prospect of planetary warming due to the release of greenhouse gasses from fossil fuel combustion, nuclear power is an increasingly attractive energy source. Since 1971, nuclear power generation in Michigan alone has prevented the release of some 94 million metric tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. In addition, our nuclear power plants annually prevent some 79,000 tons of sulfur dioxide and 37,000 tons of nitrogen oxide – the antecedents of acid rain and smog – from entering our atmosphere had coal been burned instead.

The risk from used nuclear fuel is quite different from that posed by fossil fuels, and the public understanding of fuel and their relative risks needs to be put into perspective. The radiation from used nuclear fuel is concentrated and bound up in metal fission byproducts; it can be easily contained and isolated from the environment. On the other hand, the gasses and ashes resulting from coal combustion are widely dispersed and difficult to contain. Ironically, kilowatt for kilowatt, more radiation is released into the environment from coal combustion than from nuclear fission.

Clearly, no source of energy is without its environmental impacts and we must continue our search for more benign supplies, but energy security is vital to our national security and America's future leadership of the free world. I was pleased that President Bush's National Energy Policy seeks to balance energy conservation, modernizing our energy infrastructure and increasing our energy supplies, including the amount of nuclear power production. Expanding the amount of nuclear power in our nation's energy portfolio can be accomplished in an economically and environmentally sound manner. Nuclear power is home grown and supplies cannot be choked off by politically unstable parties half a world away.

But in order for nuclear power to continue to meet our nation's growing energy needs, the federal government must continue to move the ball down the field instead of moving the goalposts. That is, Yucca Mountain must stop being the political football it has been for the past twenty years, and it must start being the safe, secure repository for used nuclear fuel that was promised so long ago.

It is my understanding that you will continue to release additional scientific information regarding Yucca Mountain throughout the coming months, and that this information will be made public beyond the requirements of federal law. I applaud your policy of open door science and peer review because good science will lead to good decisions. I also understand that based upon the scientific studies, you will soon make the decision on whether to recommend Yucca Mountain to the President as America's repository for used nuclear fuel.

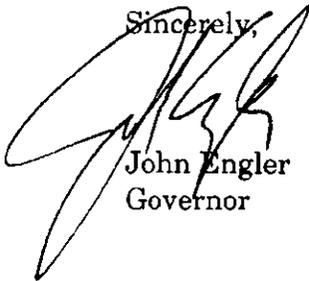
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By way of this letter, I want you to know that I am comfortable that the science already supports the suitability of Yucca Mountain for spent nuclear fuel and greater than Class C disposal. Therefore, I strongly urge you to recommend Yucca Mountain to President Bush for America's deep geologic repository. It is important that this decision is made this year – further delay and debate is simply not warranted.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Engler", is written over the word "Sincerely,".

John Engler
Governor

JE/jlf

cc: Michigan Congressional Delegation
Members of the Council of Great Lakes Governors
Senate Majority Leader Dan DeGrow
Speaker of the House Rick Johnson