

OPENING STATEMENT  
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U.S. House Science, Space, and Technology Committee Hearing  
*Assessing America's Nuclear Future – A Review of the Blue Ribbon Commission's Report to the Secretary  
of Energy*  
February 8<sup>th</sup>, 2012

Thank you, Chairman Hall, for calling this hearing today.

I also want to thank General Scowcroft, Dr. Meserve, and their fellow Commissioners for their service to the country. Given the diversity of backgrounds and expertise on the Commission, arriving at a consensus on something as potentially contentious as our nuclear future is not easy, and your effort should be considered, in itself, a model for how to move forward on this issue.

To some degree, this reflects how the national conversation regarding nuclear energy has evolved over the last few years. Once a highly polarizing and partisan debate - with ardent "pro" and "anti" nuclear camps firmly entrenched on either side - we can now have more nuanced policy discussions on everything from environmental impacts to financing issues. As a supporter of nuclear energy, I find this encouraging.

However, one thing has not changed: after five decades of commercial nuclear power in the U.S., we still have not arrived at a comprehensive and equitable plan for permanent disposal of spent nuclear fuel. Yucca Mountain has never fit that bill. It was a decision forced upon Nevada by Congress, and it was only a partial solution at that.

For this reason, I welcome the Blue Ribbon Commission's final report. It represents the strongest effort to date to move the U.S. beyond what is arguably one of our most embarrassing policy failures, and one that has spanned both Democratic and Republican Administrations. Today we are at an impasse, a stalemate, and we should have seen this coming.

In 1987, the process was short-circuited, and ultimately, it broke down. It has cost us thirty years of progress and billions of dollars. It was always controversial and unfair, and in the end we are left frustrated and angry, with an ever-growing waste stockpile, and still without a solution.

Regardless of one's personal feelings about Yucca's suitability as a repository, to spend our time and resources rehashing the same arguments reminds me of the often-quoted definition of "insanity": doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. I hope we will not go down that road again, today.

It is time to move on and try a new approach, one that seeks to gain consensus from the start by educating the public and empowering stakeholder communities. I applaud the Commission for having this as their number one recommendation. They have called for a "Consent-Based Approach" to identifying a permanent nuclear waste repository and they acknowledged that the decisions three decades ago regarding Yucca Mountain were not purely technical or scientific, but political, despite vocal and vibrant community opposition. What we need is consensus from the start. In the most powerful democracy in the world, it is the only way this will work.

And, as the most innovative economy in the world, we cannot forget the role that future technologies may play in both reducing our waste stockpile and ensuring the safety of future generations.

The Blue Ribbon Commission has given us a framework for this new approach. Some recommendations can be implemented in the near term, and some may take decades to fully realize. All of them deserve our attention and consideration today.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I yield back.