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DOE to Send Proposed Yucca Mountain Legislation to Congress

WASHINGTON, DC – Secretary of Energy Samuel W. Bodman announced today he will send to the U.S. Congress a legislative proposal to enhance the nation’s ability to manage and dispose of commercial spent nuclear fuel and Defense high-level radioactive waste.

“This legislative proposal reflects the Administration’s strong commitment to advancing the development of the Yucca Mountain repository, while seeking to provide stability, clarity and predictability in moving the project forward,” Secretary Bodman said. “Nuclear power is a clean, reliable domestic source of energy that currently represents approximately 20 percent of the nation’s energy supply. The Yucca Mountain repository is critical to the nation’s current and future energy and national security needs, and I look forward to working with the Congress on developing a bill that can be passed by Congress and signed by the President.”

The proposed legislation would facilitate the licensing and construction of the geologic repository and lead to the safe, permanent disposal of spent nuclear fuel and high-level radioactive waste deep within the mountain. Among the various provisions, the proposed legislation would withdraw, permanently from public use, the land at and surrounding the Yucca Mountain repository site in Nevada, and would facilitate Congress’s ability to provide adequate funding for the Yucca Mountain Project. Permanent withdrawal is needed to meet a Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) licensing requirement for the Yucca Mountain repository and will help assure protection of public health and the environment. Funding reform is necessary to correct a technical budgetary problem that has acted as a disincentive to adequate funding.

The proposed legislation would also eliminate the current statutory 70,000 metric ton cap on disposal capacity at Yucca Mountain, in order to allow maximum use of the mountain’s true technical capacity. This provision would help provide the safe isolation of the nation’s entire commercial spent nuclear fuel inventory from existing reactors, including life extensions.

Also included are provisions for a more streamlined NRC licensing process, and for initiation of infrastructure activities, including safety and other upgrades and rail line construction, to enable earlier start-up of operations. Other provisions are designed to consolidate duplicative environmental reviews.

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“We have a legal and moral obligation to get Yucca Mountain opened and operating,” Office of Civilian Radioactive Waste Management Director Ward Sproat said. “Currently 55,000 metric tons of commercial spent nuclear fuel and Defense high-level waste is being stored at more than 100 above-ground sites in 39 states, and that number grows by about 2,000 metric tons annually. By entombing it deep in Yucca Mountain – a safe and secure permanent geologic repository – we can ensure public safety for thousands of generations.”

Yucca Mountain was approved by the Congress and the President as the site for the nation’s first permanent spent nuclear fuel and high-level radioactive waste geologic repository in 2002.

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