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Senators air nuclear grievances at NRC confirmation hearing

The Hill

September 9, 2014

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Senators on the Environment and Public Works Committee used a hearing Tuesday on two nominees to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) to air their concerns with how the commission works.

The complaints ranged from how the commission has changed its role after the 2010 nuclear reactor disaster in Japan to allegations that the agency is overfunded and what documents it can give to the Senate.

President Obama nominated Jeffrey Baran and Stephen Burns in July to fill empty seats on the commission. Baran works for the House Energy and Commerce Committee on issues including nuclear power and Burns was an NRC attorney for three decades.

The senators sought mostly to make their objections about the NRC known,

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though they at times asked Baran and Burns whether they agreed.

Sen. James Inhofe (R-Okla.), the panel's former chairman, said that under his watch, the NRC's budget has increased by about 30 percent, due to an expectation that its workload would increase. But it never approved the major applications that were filed.

A legitimate review of the agency's staff levels and current workloads needs to be examined by the commission ... and cuts need to be made if current staff levels cannot be justified when compared to the mission and needs of the NRC then versus now," Inhofe said.

He added that the result of overstaffing at the agency has been overregulation of the nuclear power sector, because employees don't have enough work to do.

Many of these new regulations have been in response to the Fukushima disaster in Japan, and while each rule by itself may not be considered costly, when added to the many other orders and regulations being considered, the cumulative costs skyrocket," • he said.

Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.), the committee's chairwoman, criticized the NRC for its handling of California's only remaining nuclear plant and another that was recently decommissioned.

The operating plant, Boxer said, does not conform with the NRC's decisions about its safety requirements.

Baran and Burns both agreed in principle that plants should follow the NRC's rules, though they did not comment on the specifics of California's plants.

"I think it's important, because NRC makes the decision, and I think they should enforce it," Boxer said.

Sen. Ed Markey (D-Mass.) said the NRC has refused to give him non-public documents he has requested, despite a 2011 law that requires such disclosures.

But the agency is still refusing to comply with this law, and it won't respond to many of my information requests about serious safety and security matters, • he said.

Sen. John Barrasso (R-Wyo.) criticized Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) over reports that Reid can effectively veto nominees for the NRC.

"We do need to maintain a full, qualified slate of commissioners who continue to protect our communities by ensuring nuclear safety," he said. "This is best achieved by having experienced commissioners who aren't removed and called names on the Senate floor because they don't share the majority leader's narrow political agenda."

In their own statements, Baran and Burns both committed to being open-minded and committing to NRC's priorities of safely and effectively regulating the industry.

Boxer said she wants to move forward with the nominations quickly, and will schedule a meeting Thursday to vote.

***Note: The Senate Environment and Public Works Committee has approved the nominees and the full Senate is scheduled to vote on them on Tuesday, September 16; the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee voted unanimously yesterday to approve the nomination of Dr. Elizabeth Sherwood-Randall to be Deputy Secretary of Energy.

Department of Energy's National Labs Can Also Be Regional Hubs

Brookings Institution

September 11, 2014

[LINK](#)

The Department of Energy's 17 national laboratories are a \$12.5 billion network of potentially transformative basic and applied R&D hubs located in or near many of the nation's metropolitan areas. However, the labs are today underutilized as true economic assets.

How can they be better leveraged?

There are lots of ideas out there, but as we argue in a new paper, one of the most effective ways for the labs to increase their economic impact is for them to "go local" and engage more in the advanced industry ecosystems within which they reside.

Of course, this recommendation may sound counterintuitive--or even objectionable--to some. Some will question prioritizing economic development as a top goal for these institutions, given their historical mission in basic research and national security. (Los Alamos and Oak Ridge National Laboratories, among others, owe their creation to the Manhattan Project that produced the first atomic bombs during World War II). At the same time, others will insist that the labs are national institutions with global expertise. They will argue that adding a regional focus will weaken--not strengthen--the labs' ability to support the national economy.

However, we think that going local (at least to an extent) is both justifiable and advisable. President Obama, former DOE Secretary Chu and DOE Secretary Moniz have all already called on the labs to go beyond their basic science missions to support the national economy through greater technology transfer. Essentially, they argue that the labs can and should be critical drivers of U.S. innovation-based growth. Meanwhile, we would say that one way the labs can maximize the use of their scientific competencies for economic benefit is to engage more in their regions. Arguing for that shift is the move in recent decades from "closed" to "open" models of innovation, with the increased embrace of network- and partnership-oriented processes. Moreover, we would note that the preponderance of economic research shows that the geographic clustering of firms, suppliers, labs and universities generates significant mutual advantage through asset sharing, the sharing of skilled labor pools and knowledge spillovers.

Which is why we contend that regional economic development can be an important adjunct to--and expression of--the lab system's national scientific mission. By engaging more with relevant local industry clusters the labs can contribute more to local and national economic growth as well as profit themselves. For evidence of that one only has to look at some of the locally

oriented partnerships that are already making a difference across the system, whether it be Oak Ridge's Carbon Fiber Consortium or the National Renewable Energy Laboratory's participation with Colorado's top universities in the Colorado Energy Research Collaboratory. In each case (and there are many other examples) the relevance of a world-class scientific institute has only been augmented through its regional engagements.

To achieve the new orientation, meanwhile, we suggest more than a dozen frequently administrative, mostly low-cost management tweaks. These would prioritize the labs' economic and tech-transfer activities; facilitate more interaction with small and medium-sized businesses; increase the institutions' relevance to local clusters; and provide local lab managers greater discretion. In doing so, the adjustments would seek to update not just the rules and incentives under which the labs operate but also their proud but insulated "behind the fence" culture. Nothing will be easy, of course, but we see significant enthusiasm for greater regional engagement not just at the top of DOE but among the system's talented cadre of lab directors.

The moment, in short, appears promising. The time is right for a world-class set of innovation institutions to embrace the new economics of geography and participate more fully in the innovation systems of their home regions.

SRNS expands work with small businesses

Aiken Standard

September 8, 2014

[LINK](#)

The Savannah River Site's management and operations contractor reported it is benefiting from participating small and minority-owned businesses while boosting area economies with the expansion of its SRS Mentor-Protege Program.

Savannah River Nuclear Solutions, or SRNS, reported in a recent press release that it is creating multi-year contracts with businesses, a change from current contracts that are limited to a matter of days or a few months.

The program was developed to significantly increase the number of small businesses providing products and services at the Site, each serving as a subcontractor in support of the larger contractors.

Dawn Moore, an SRNS manager of Supply Chain Management Policy and Compliance, wrote that working with Mentor-Protege subcontractors improves the ability to meet contractual responsibilities to the Energy Department.

"At the same time, it creates numerous opportunities for our company to work closely with each of these small businesses with a goal to nurture and enhance their economic and technical capabilities," Moore added.

Under the program, SRNS recently inked an agreement with US&S, a maintenance company from Greenville. The agreement allowed the small business to hire 14 local residents to perform general maintenance at SRS, supplementing the Site's existing maintenance personnel.

Business owner Richard Hagins said he's been pleased with the program, that SRS has been genuine in its work to help small companies.

"We'd recommend any qualified business to take advantage of this exceptional program and the opportunities it offers," • he said.

David Moody, Savannah River Operations office manager, added, "Small companies are the heart and life blood of our cities and towns. It's to our advantage to support them in any practical and feasible way possible at SRS." •

Advisory board questions Hanford reactor cleanup proposal

Tri-City Herald

September 7, 2014

[LINK](#)

The Hanford Advisory Board remains concerned about the thoroughness of proposed final plans for the first of the Hanford reactor areas on which environmental cleanup is being completed.

In one spot near the former plutonium-production F Reactor, contamination is not projected to dissipate for 264 years if the Department of Energy follows its preferred plan to allow it to naturally dissipate, according to the board, which met Thursday and Friday in Pasco.

It is one of 15 waste sites with contamination deeper than 15 feet in the ground near F Reactor along the Columbia River.

In another place there, irrigation would be prohibited as a conservative measure, according to DOE.

The final cleanup proposal for the area around F Reactor is being scrutinized by the board and other interested groups as a document that is likely to set the tone for the cleanup around all nine of the Hanford reactors that produced plutonium during World War II and the Cold War.

Most cleanup at F Reactor has been completed over the last two decades, with 2 million tons of contaminated material removed. DOE and its regulators now are considering what remaining work should be done. After a final cleanup decision is made, a review every five years will make sure that public health and the environment remain protected.

DOE is proposing a soil cleanup plan that would cost \$21 million and a groundwater plan estimated to cost \$36 million. They would rely partly on controls to prevent some remaining contamination from being disturbed for what the board said is as long as 264 years and natural attenuation of chemical and radionuclides. That could include processes such as biodegradation, dispersion, dilution and radioactive decay.

The proposed plan would prevent some use of Hanford land and resources, board members said.

"Keeping people from using valuable groundwater and sites alongside the Columbia River at Hanford is not a cleanup plan," said Gerald Pollet, executive director of Heart of America Northwest. "People will be exposed to dangerous contamination, including tribal members exercising their treaty rights to live along and fish along those shorelines."

Some groundwater contaminants could be removed sooner by active treatment,

including pump and treat systems that pump up contaminated water and clean it before reinjecting it into the ground. However, the estimated cost would be \$177 million to \$194 million.

Cost should not be a determining criterion that prohibits cleanup thorough enough to allow unrestricted use, the board said.

The board recommended that DOE and its regulators -- the state of Washington and the Environmental Protection Agency -- take action as appropriate to significantly reduce the time in which cleanup goals are attained. The use of controls to prevent disturbance of waste over long periods is not acceptable near the F Reactor, it said.

It particularly wants waste dug up at the site where contamination will not dissipate for 264 years.

DOE said leaving some contaminants deeper than 15 feet in the ground meets Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act, or Superfund, legal requirements. The ground would have to be dug up to deeper than 15 feet for people to come in contact with the waste, it said.

The board also recommended that future documents and reviews look at possible indications that waste is not dissipating as expected.

With a need for controls to be maintained for as long as 264 years, the consequences of events such as severe flooding or the failure of the Grand Coulee Dam also should be considered, the board recommended.

Some board members also were concerned that materials released to explain the proposed cleanup plan during a public comment period that closed in August were not as complete as they believed they should be.

As plans for final cleanup around other reactors is considered, information should be made available to the public providing specific notice of restrictions on use of land, water or other resources that would be required by cleanup proposals, Pollet said.

The public also should have a chance to say if DOE's expectations for exposure to the public, based on how the land and resources might be used, are reasonable, he said. The board may consider more recommendations to DOE before the next public comment period on proposed final cleanup plans for reactor areas.

NRC decides siting a nuclear waste repository isn't a priority

Sentinel Source

September 10, 2014

[LINK](#)

Vernon, Vt., officially became the nation's nuclear waste repository late last month. So did Seabrook; and Rowe and Plymouth, Mass.; and Wiscasset, Maine.

Forget Yucca Mountain. The federal government has. Instead, for the foreseeable future, our nation's high-level radioactive waste will be stored right where it's generated.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission ruled spent nuclear fuel can continue to be

stored on-site at the nation's nuclear power plants indefinitely. It also issued an environmental impact statement on the topic, which allowed the commission to then lift a moratorium it had put in place two years ago on siting or expanding nuclear plants until the issue of storage was settled.

It's worth noting the environmental impact statement doesn't deal with the impact of abandoning the storage sites down the road. What would happen if, say, the tons of high-level radioactive waste that will eventually be encased in concrete at the Vermont Yankee plant in Vernon were allowed to languish, the concrete decaying, or, worse, what if it was left unguarded? The NRC took an ignorant-apathetic approach to the issue: it doesn't know and it doesn't care.

Twenty-one years ago, Yankee Rowe shut down. It was a smaller plant than Vermont Yankee, and its owner says it now costs about \$8 million per year to store and protect the 533 spent fuel assemblies the plant had generated in 31 years.

At year's end, Vermont Yankee will shut down in Vernon, having generated close to 4,000 such assemblies. Most are still in the plant's spent-fuel pool, but they will eventually be transferred to the dry cask storage outside the main building. And there they will sit, for decades at best, permanently at worst.

During an interview in 2007, then presidential candidate Barack Obama told The Sentinel: "Nuclear power should be in the mix IF we can make it safe, we know how to store it, we can make sure it's not vulnerable to terrorist attack, it's not enhancing proliferation...there are a whole set of questions, and they may not be solvable. And if they're not solvable, then I don't want to invest in it." •

Apparently, he's now decided we do know how to store it, and we do know how to safeguard it from terrorist attack. Because without anything changing in the quest to find solutions to those questions, the NRC has decided it's once again time to invest in nuclear energy.

That's the same NRC, by the way, that Obama called a "moribund agency that needs to be revamped and has become captive of the industries it regulates" • in that 2007 interview. Since then, he's replaced four of the five commissioners and reconfirmed the fifth, so we'd guess whatever revamping he had in mind has already taken place.

That said, we've not seen evidence the commission is any less captive to the financial bottom line of those it was created to oversee. This latest decision not only dismisses the unresolved concern of continuing to store high-level waste at operating nuclear power plants, it stands to make long-term targets of even those plants that are no longer in operation. Further, it allows regulators to set aside efforts to find a permanent solution to the issue of dealing with that waste safely.

Workers enter room named for Hanford's "Atomic Man"

Tri-City Herald
September 10, 2014
[LINK](#)

Richland - Workers entered the McCluskey Room, the site of one of Hanford's worst radiological accidents, this week after a year of preparation.

The room still contains the glove box where a 1976 chemical explosion shattered

the thick glass windows of the box.

Radioactive concentrated nitric acid and shards of glass and metal sprayed into the neck and face of worker Harold McCluskey.

He received 500 times the amount of radiation doctors considered safe in a lifetime, but survived and came to be known as the Atomic Man.

The room at the Plutonium Finishing Plant was too radioactively contaminated to be used again and was shut up for periods of as long as 15 years at a time before a serious cleanup effort began in 2010.

Workers used federal economic recovery act money then to enter the room more than 200 times wearing supplied-air respirators, before money ran out.

Three of the McCluskey Room glove boxes remain, including one that stretches down the center of the room and the glove box that was damaged in the explosion.

Usually the glove boxes, with thick windows and portals with attached gloves where workers reach their hands into to do work with radioactive materials inside the box, shield workers from radiation.

Over the next year, workers will remove large pieces of processing equipment, including the glove boxes and tanks.

"This was the first of multiple entries workers will make to clean out processing equipment and get the McCluskey Room ready for demolition along with the rest of the plant," said Bryan Foley, Department of Energy project director.

Numerous hazards remain in the room as the result of the chemical explosion, including airborne radioactivity and surface contamination.

One of the first tasks for the crew is improving ventilation and airflow to better protect workers from the airborne contamination in the room as they clean out the room and its equipment.

"The time and effort workers put into finding the right equipment and training will ensure they are as prepared as possible to remain safe during the cleanup," Foley said.

CH2M Hill Plateau Remediation Co. workers will continue to enter the room four at a time, with a support team of at least 15 workers to assist in dressing, undressing and monitoring during each carefully planned and choreographed entry into the highly contaminated area.

Workers are wearing protective gear that is being used at Hanford for the first time, after traveling to the Idaho Cleanup Project to check out the gear used there.

They include billowing, air-filled one-piece suits with air for both breathing and to circulate cool air through the suits supplied by a compressor. Monitors check for radiation inside the suits and transmit information to a computer.

The suits contain "an escape pack," • a container with enough air to allow workers to leave the McCluskey Room if something goes wrong with their

supplied air system.

The new suits are expected to allow substantially longer entries into the room than the 45 minutes allowed in the suits used previously.

Input from workers on the equipment has led to adjustments and "has been the key to being able to enter the room safely as we start this challenging cleanup project," said Mike Swartz, CH2M Hill vice president.

High Flux Isotope Reactor at ORNL named Nuclear Historic Landmark

Oak Ridge Today
September 11, 2014
[LINK](#)

The High Flux Isotope Reactor, or HFIR, now in its 48th year of providing neutrons for research and isotope production at Oak Ridge National Laboratory, has been designated a Nuclear Historic Landmark by the American Nuclear Society.

"This designation from the ANS recognizes HFIR's role in the history of the nuclear age, but it also speaks to the excellence of its design and operation," ORNL Director Thom Mason said. "HFIR remains one of the world's most capable reactor-based neutron science, radioisotope production, and materials irradiation facilities, and we expect that to continue for many years."

The designation was proposed by the ANS honors and awards committee and approved on initial ballot by the board of directors.

"The ANS Nuclear Historic Landmark signifies that a nuclear facility has played an important role in nuclear science and engineering," ANS President Michael C. Brady Raap said. "HFIR, with its preeminent role in isotope production and neutron science, certainly meets that criteria."

The reactor was conceived in the late 1950s as a production reactor to meet anticipated demand for transuranic isotopes ("heavy" elements such as plutonium and curium). HFIR today is a U.S. Department of Energy Office of Science User Facility and one of the world's sole sources of the radioisotope californium-252, used in industry and medicine. ORNL is a DOE lab.

Researchers also use the reactor's neutron production for neutron scattering analysis, a technique pioneered at its predecessor ORNL reactors, the Graphite Reactor and the Oak Ridge Research Reactor. A major upgrade to HFIR in 2007 provided improved beam lines, new instruments, and a cold source that expanded its research capabilities by literally chilling, or removing energy from, the neutrons.

HFIR has been a key contributor to four decades of research into materials for use in all types of nuclear reactors. HFIR provides researchers around the world with unique irradiation capabilities for studies that range from basic materials research to the development of advanced alloys for fusion or space reactor applications.

HFIR and the Spallation Neutron Source, an accelerator-based neutron facility

that is the world's most powerful pulsed neutron source, make ORNL a leading center for neutron research. The reactor and its suite of instruments support basic research and analysis of a host of materials with applications that range from higher temperature superconductors and advanced batteries to pharmaceuticals and biofuels.

HFIR also has a historical role. Neutron analysis performed at HFIR was used in the investigation of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy and also helped prove that nineteenth century President Zachary Taylor died of natural causes. More recently the radioisotope berkelium-249 produced at HFIR was used to discover and then confirm the existence of element 117.

The reactor, operating at 85 megawatts of power, is currently in its 455th fuel cycle since the first cycle in 1966. HFIR joins the Graphite Reactor, Tower Shielding Reactor, Oak Ridge Electron Linear Accelerator, the Molten Salt Reactor, and the Radiochemical Processing Plant as ANS Nuclear Historic Landmarks at ORNL, a multiprogram research lab begun during the Manhattan Project.

Environmental Management Site-Specific Advisory Board, Savannah River Site Meeting

Federal Register
September 9, 2014

[LINK](#)

SUMMARY:

This notice announces a meeting of the Environmental Management Site-Specific Advisory Board (EM SSAB), Savannah River Site. The Federal Advisory Committee Act (92, 86 Stat. 770) requires that public notice of this meeting be announced in the Federal Register.

DATES:

Monday, September 22, 2014; 1 p.m.-4:30 p.m.
Tuesday, September 23, 2014; 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m.

ADDRESSES:

Holiday Inn, 2225 Boundary Street, Beaufort, SC 29902.

PURPOSE OF THE BOARD: The purpose of the Board is to make recommendations to DOE-EM and site management in the areas of environmental restoration, waste management, and related activities.

TENTATIVE AGENDA:

Monday, Sept. 22, 2014
1 p.m. Combined Committees Session
Order of committees:
Facilities Disposition & Site Remediation
Nuclear Materials
Waste Management
Administrative & Outreach
Strategic & Legacy Management

4:15 p.m. Public Comments Session
4:30 p.m. Adjourn

Tuesday, Sept. 23, 2014 [Back to Top](#)

8:30 a.m. Opening, Pledge, Approval of Minutes, and Chair Update
9:15 a.m. Welcome from Beaufort Mayor
9:30 a.m. Recommendation & Work Plan Status
9:45 a.m. Agency Updates
10:30 a.m. Public Comments Session
10:45 a.m. Break
11 a.m. Strategic & Legacy Management Report
11:45 a.m. Waste Management Report
12:30 p.m. Public Comments Session
12:45 p.m. Lunch Break
2:15 p.m. Facilities Disposition & Site Remediation Report
4 p.m. Administrative & Outreach Report
4:15 p.m. Nuclear Materials Report
4:45 p.m. Public Comments Session
5 p.m. Adjourn

Three Years After Fukushima, Japan Approves a Nuclear Plant

The New York Times
September 10, 2014

[LINK](#)

TOKYO -- For the first time since the Fukushima disaster three and a half years ago, Japan's new nuclear regulatory agency declared Wednesday that an atomic power plant was safe to operate, in a widely watched move that brings Japan a step closer to restarting its idled nuclear industry.

The two reactors at the Sendai power plant on the southern island of Kyushu are the first to be certified as safe enough to restart by the Nuclear Regulation Authority since the agency was created two years ago to restore public confidence in nuclear oversight. All of Japan's 48 operable commercial nuclear reactors were shut down after the March 2011 triple meltdown at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station created serious public doubts about the safety of atomic power in earthquake-prone Japan.

Even with the approval, it will probably be months before either of the reactors can be turned back on. In addition to further safety checks, the plant's operator, the Kyushu Electric Power Company, must obtain the consent of local governments around the plant. The final decision on whether to restart the plant will be made by the prime minister, probably in December, according to local news media reports.

The approval follows intense political pressure on the new agency by the government of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who supports big business and wants to restore atomic energy as part of his strategy to revive the nation's long-anemic economy. He also wants to end Japan's ballooning trade deficits, which many here attribute to the rising cost of imported fuel to make up for the loss of nuclear-generated electricity.

However, opinion polls have shown that the public remains skeptical about both the safety of the plants and the ability of Mr. Abe's governing Liberal Democratic

Party to ensure that safety, as the party has long had close ties to the politically powerful nuclear industry. Those doubts were aired last month during a monthlong public comment period after the Nuclear Regulation Authority released a draft report in July that expressed approval of the Sendai plant's safety measures.

The agency said it had received 17,800 comments, more than it expected. Many were highly skeptical about the safety of the Sendai plant, which is in a volcanically active area. Still, the agency on Wednesday ended up adopting its July findings without major modifications.

The agency said it made the decision after reviewing 18,600 pages of supporting documents filed by Kyushu Electric, as well as the results of its own inspections of the plant. It said the design and construction of the reactors and other facilities, and also the contingency plans for dealing with emergencies, met new safety standards that the agency adopted in July of last year.

"I think the huge number of public comments, more than anything, reflects the enormous sensitivity toward the restart question, and the safety of nuclear power," Kenzo Oshima, a commissioner at the agency, told reporters. "I also see it as reflecting a strong desire after the Fukushima accident to learn from that experience and raise the level of safety."

Agency officials have sought to reassure the public by calling the new safety standards the most stringent in the world, saying they fully incorporate the lessons of the Fukushima disaster, which happened when an earthquake and tsunami knocked out vital cooling systems at the Fukushima plant.

Opponents of the restart said the agency was ignoring the concerns raised in the public comments. They said the agency, which had started amid high hopes for more independent oversight, was looking more and more like a rubber stamp for the administration.

"There was clearly huge pressure on the regulatory agency from the Abe government," said Akira Kimura, a professor of peace studies at Kagoshima University who has been involved in efforts to block the restart of the Sendai plant. "This government is just ramming through its agenda, with complete disregard for the public will."