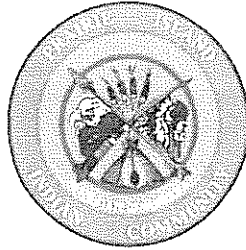


Ronald Johnson
President

Lucy Taylor
Secretary



Johnny Johnson
Vice President

Victoria Winfrey
Treasurer

Shelley Buck
Assistant Secretary/Treasurer

House Energy Finance and Policy Division

Chair: Rep. Bill Hilty

Agenda: HF1091 (Mahoney) New nuclear power plant certificate of need prohibition abolished

Thursday, March 26, 2009 / 6:30 p.m. / Room 200, State Office Building

Prairie Island Indian Community Statement – As Submitted to the Committee

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

Good evening, my name is Ron Johnson and I am the president of the Prairie Island Indian Community Tribal Council. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

As you may know, the Prairie Island Indian Community is located in southeastern Minnesota along the banks of the Mississippi River, approximately 50 miles from the Twin Cities. Prairie Island is among the closest communities in the nation to a nuclear power plant and its above-ground nuclear waste storage site. The plant's twin nuclear reactors and two dozen large cement nuclear waste storage casks currently sit just 600 yards from our homes.

The Prairie Island Indian Community opposes the expansion of the nuclear power industry, including the repeal of Minnesota's moratorium on new nuclear power facilities. We believe it is irresponsible to allow the construction of new nuclear power plants anywhere in the United States until the federal government keeps its 25-year old promise to solve the nuclear waste problem.

Serious Safety, Health and Environmental Concerns at Prairie Island

Since it went on-line in 1973, Xcel Energy's Prairie Island nuclear power plant has been a major concern to our community members with respect to safety, health and environmental issues. A number of issues related to the operation of the plant have heightened our concerns, including:

- two radiological leaks at the plant, which is now among the oldest operating nuclear power plants in the United States;
- the storage of nuclear waste inside and outside the plant in 24 dry casks, which sit on a cement pad in the floodplain of the Mississippi River near our homes, businesses, church and community center;

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- high-voltage power lines running directly adjacent to many homes in our community; and
- the transportation of hazardous materials to and from the plant. For example, just this February, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission issued a warning against Xcel for shipping radioactive testing equipment from its Prairie Island nuclear power plant last fall that emitted between five and 10 times more radiation than safety standards allow.

In addition, we have emergency evacuation concerns given that our only evacuation route off Prairie Island is frequently blocked by passing trains.

And we remain concerned that the plant and waste storage facility will continue to pose an unacceptable risk to our community for the next several decades and possibly longer.

The Potential of 98 Nuclear Waste Storage Casks at Prairie Island Until 2094

The Prairie Island storage site is licensed by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) to hold up to 48 casks of high-level, radioactive nuclear waste. Twenty-nine storage casks are needed to get the plant through the end of its current operating licenses, which expire in 2013 and 2014. If the plant is re-licensed for an additional 20 years, 69 new casks would be necessary – 35 are needed for license renewal and 34 for decommissioning. This brings the total number of casks to 98. Each of these storage casks contain 40 spent fuel assemblies, which represents approximately 25 tons of nuclear waste.

The NRC's current Waste Confidence Rule allows for on-site storage for 30 years beyond licensed life – or until 2063 and 2064 at the Prairie Island plant if it is re-licensed – and states that a national waste repository will be available by 2025. However, because of delays with Yucca Mountain, the longtime promised national repository, it is becoming less likely that a repository will be available by 2025 if ever.

In addition, because of proposed changes to the Waste Confidence Rule – changes that would now allow for on-site storage for 60 years beyond license life – the casks could be at Prairie Island for close to 100 years, until 2094, a date that is completely unacceptable to our community.

No New Nuclear Power Plants without a National Waste Repository

As indicated, 25 years after Congress passed the Nuclear Waste Policy Act and mandated the establishment of a national repository, the future of the nation's nuclear waste disposal program remains very much in doubt.

The proposed spent-fuel repository at Nevada's Yucca Mountain has suffered numerous political and bureaucratic setbacks and may never open. Yucca Mountain opponents have succeeded in diverting needed funding for the project as part of explicit efforts to slowly starve the project to death. Officially, Yucca Mountain was scheduled to begin accepting nuclear waste by 2010, but now, if it's licensed at all, the Department of Energy says it won't open until 2020 or later.

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Most concerning, President Obama, his energy secretary, Steven Chu, and U.S. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid have recently stated the administration's intention to completely abandon the project and have proposed cutting off almost all funding for Yucca Mountain in the 2010 federal budget.

Prairie Island believes the federal government must deliver on its promise to move nuclear waste to a safe, secure facility before the nation embraces a so-called nuclear power renaissance. Until that happens, it is irresponsible for any state, including Minnesota, to entertain building new nuclear power plants.

No Expansion of Generating Capacity at Existing Sites

Furthermore, if Minnesota's nuclear power plant moratorium is repealed, we are opposed to any expansion of generating capacity at existing sites. The long term, dangerous burdens of expanding nuclear power should be borne by communities other than Prairie Island and Monticello. Any proposals to build a third nuclear reactor to Xcel Energy's Prairie Island plant will be met by stiff opposition from our community. Similarly, we will vigorously fight any proposals to expand waste storage capacity or make Prairie Island a regional nuclear waste storage site.

We believe the state of Minnesota can find better and safer ways to grow and meet its energy needs by promoting comprehensive, sustainable and fair energy policies. We welcome the opportunity and look forward to working with you on these efforts.

Thank you.