

Remarks by Ambassador Gregory L. Schulte
U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations Office in Vienna and
the International Atomic Energy Agency
at the Third International Conference on Geologic Repositories

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The Global Nuclear Energy Partnership
and Our Shared Nuclear Future

Ladies and gentlemen, it is a pleasure for me to take part in this third international conference on geological disposal of radioactive waste.

I would also like to extend greetings on behalf of U.S. Energy Secretary Samuel Bodman. He appreciates the sustained international dialogue on geologic disposal since it was first suggested by the Department of Energy at the IAEA's 1998 General Conference.

In 1999, the first international conference on geologic repositories concluded that:

No matter which fuel cycle is chosen or what the future holds for nuclear power, geological repositories will be an essential part of the waste management systems.

Since then, the expanded use of nuclear power in the U.S. and elsewhere has grown more likely. Already, license renewals have been granted for **almost half** of all U.S. reactors, and renewal applications have been filed or planned for 27 more. Even more telling, just three weeks ago, a U.S. utility filed the first license application for new construction in 33 years. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission expects as many as 30 such applications.

Because nuclear energy does not emit green house gases, many countries are exploring the option of nuclear power to meet energy demands. At last month's Major Economies Meeting on Energy Security and Climate Change, President Bush pointed to nuclear power as "the one existing source of energy that can generate massive amounts of electricity without causing any air pollution or greenhouse gas emissions."

Geologic repositories are important—this international dialogue is important—because solving the waste problem is key to the continued use and expansion of nuclear power. Nuclear power is the only mature, emissions-free technology that can supply the necessary power to meet the projected increase in demand for electricity

On the other hand, it carries the proliferation risks of the nuclear fuel cycle. To address both the promise and the risk of nuclear energy, the U.S. launched the Global Nuclear Energy Partnership, GNEP, to develop alternatives to sensitive fuel cycle technologies. GNEP will develop advanced technologies that will maximize the energy derived from the uranium dug out of the ground, minimize the risk of nuclear proliferation and reduce the waste destined for long-term storage.

I am pleased to report that the GNEP Partnership recently tripled in size to 16 countries at its second meeting on September 16th. The meeting was attended by representatives of 35 nations and three international organizations. These countries represented every region around the world and every stage of nuclear power development. The ministerial participants discussed a vision for the future of clean, safe, affordable, secure nuclear energy that does not contribute to proliferation.

GNEP seeks viable alternatives to sensitive fuel cycle technologies. Several proposals have been presented at the IAEA that would provide reliable access to nuclear power reactor fuel as a back up to the commercial market.

We hope the IAEA Board of Governors will be able to make a decision on these concepts in the next year. GNEP also envisions fuel leasing and spent fuel take-back mechanisms in the future.

The United States is working through GNEP with other nations to develop and deploy advanced reactors that consume transuranic elements. Through GNEP, partner countries are developing technologies for recycling spent nuclear fuel that do not separate plutonium. It is envisioned that such advanced fuel cycle technologies will reduce the quantity of nuclear waste, simplify its disposition, and extend the capacity of geologic repositories.

The need for repositories will not go away. But they may not fill as quickly and the waste in them may not be as radioactive for as long.

Conferences like this one can help to refute the canard, often repeated by opponents of nuclear power, that “no one knows what to do about the waste.”

Science will enable the technological advances that lie behind GNEP.

Science also underpins the broad international consensus that geologic disposal is a feasible and safe way to dispose of high-level radioactive waste.

That consensus was reaffirmed in a 2000 study by the U.S. National Academy of Sciences, which was supported by nine countries. After studying a range of alternatives, the Committee stated that:

“After four decades of study, geological disposal remains **the only scientifically and technically credible long-term solution available** to meet the need for safety without reliance on active management. It also offers security benefits because it would place fissile materials out of reach of all but the most sophisticated weapons builders.”

The second International Conference on Geologic Repositories, held in Stockholm in 2003, found “that technological aspects of geological disposal can be considered to have been solved. Although further progress will surely be made, no major breakthrough is expected in this area and many consider the technology to be mature.”

In the U.S., we are making progress toward our own geologic repository. In 2002, the President approved the Yucca Mountain site. This action – supported by bipartisan majorities in both houses of Congress – was a critical step in a decision process laid out in our 1982 Nuclear Waste Policy

Act. The next step is for the Department of Energy to submit a license application to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. As you will hear in more detail tomorrow from DOE's Director of Civilian Radioactive Waste Management, Ward Sproat, DOE is on track to submit that license application no later than June 30th of next year.

The U.S. is committed to make nuclear power more widely available. It is also committed to solving the challenge of safe radioactive waste disposal by the development of a permanent repository. A geologic repository is needed under any fuel cycle scenario. We believe that the technology development and demonstration of a closed fuel cycle, as envisioned in GNEP, and licensing and development of the Yucca Mountain repository are compatible and mutually supportive.

We believe that a geologic repository is vital to the management of nuclear waste from current nuclear energy production and also to the successful expansion of nuclear energy in the United States.

The theme of this conference is "A common objective, a variety of paths."

It is clear that different nations have different needs and considerations with

respect to repositories. However, it is also clear that a worldwide consensus on the technical, regulatory, and political issues of permanent disposal is emerging.

Through GNEP, we envision a world in which nuclear power is a leading source of energy and available to more states worldwide. GNEP partners are committed to promoting nuclear energy as a clean source of power, reducing proliferation risks, and addressing nuclear waste burdens.

We also envision approaches to the fuel cycle that offer significant nonproliferation advantages by ending the production of separated plutonium, drawing down inventories of plutonium and spent fuel, and assuring reliable fuel services, while extracting greater energy value. We invite other states to share this vision to join us in adopting these principles and moving forward to expand the civil use of nuclear power.

No single state can deal effectively on its own with the challenges of energy, proliferation, and waste management that face the world. Energy markets are global, as are the consequences of our energy choices. Enduring solutions

will require common approaches, shared aims, cooperation, and consistent effort.