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United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 5, 1996

The Honorable Hazel O'Leary
Secretary
U.S. Department of Energy
1000 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary O'Leary:

We are writing to urge the Department of Energy to take steps to comply with the FY '96 Energy and Water Development Appropriations Conference Report language which directs DOE to work toward completion of the core scientific tests at Yucca Mountain that are essential to determine the suitability of the site as a permanent repository for nuclear waste.

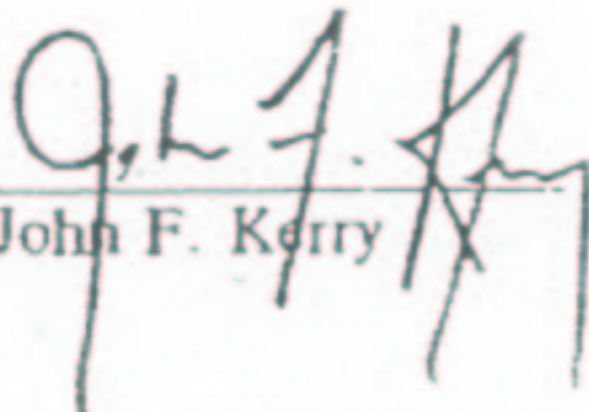
As you know, the Department of Energy estimated that the scientific investigation of the suitability of the Yucca Mountain site could be completed by 2006, and if the site is at that point deemed suitable, a repository for nuclear waste could be established there and made functional by 2015.

Proper scientific characterization of the thermal conditions are crucial to the stability and design of the repository which must safely contain nuclear waste for 10,000 years. A 1993 GAO report (GAO/RCED-93-124) found that analysis of thermal loading capacity at Yucca Mountain, a key technical issue, was not being funded by DOE at the necessary levels.

It is important for us to move towards a viable and safe solution to the nation's need for a permanent nuclear waste repository. We are very hopeful that DOE will move expeditiously to comply with the direction of the conferees and properly fund scientific and technical suitability testing at Yucca Mountain.

We appreciate your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,


John F. Kerry


Edward M. Kennedy