

December 16, 2014

The Honorable Ernest Moniz
Secretary
U.S. Department of Energy
1000 Independence Ave, SW
Washington, DC 20585

Dear Secretary Moniz,

I am writing to bring to your attention the attached report from the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) on the status of the high-level waste tanks at Hanford.¹ The report, which was delivered to me over the Thanksgiving holiday, proffers little to give thanks about. The tanks at Hanford – both single shell (SST) and double shell (DST) – are in deteriorating condition and the schedule for addressing the problem is slipping inexorably into the future. Although the Department of Energy (DOE) has expanded its programs to monitor leaks from the tanks, I am deeply concerned about what continues to be a policy of watch-and-wait.

GAO makes three recommendations which the Department has officially accepted. The Department is to be commended for this response. However, the Office of Environmental Management response does not commit to any sort of schedule for implementing those recommendations. Agreeing to the GAO recommendations is one thing, implementing them is another. As such, I respectfully request that the Department provide me with a schedule and plan for the implementation of each of GAO's recommendations within 90 days of the date of this letter.

More disturbing is the statement from DOE indicating, notwithstanding repeated assurances to the contrary, that DOE does not fully understand the cause for the leaks in tank AY-102. In its official response to the GAO, the Office of Environmental Management states "In 2012, these [monitoring] programs identified a leak in DST AY-102. To the extent that the cause of the leak can be determined when DOE completes removal of the waste from this tank, that information will inform the assessments and maintenance of the other DSTs."² This will not happen until March 2017 – an unacceptably long time from now.

Similarly, DOE's response letter says that it will reduce the volume of surface liquids in the SSTs, but it does not commit, despite the Hanford Tri-Party Agreement and Consent Decree, to

¹ *Hanford Cleanup: Condition of Tanks May Further Limit DOE's Ability to Respond to Leaks and Intrusions*, November, 2014, GAO-15-40

² Letter from Mark Whitney, Acting Assistant Secretary for Environmental Management to David Trimble, Director, Natural Resources and Environment, U.S. Government Accountability Office, November 7, 2014 @ page 35.

meeting and maintaining interim stabilization criteria for these tanks. GAO reports that 14 SSTs have intrusions of water making it very difficult for normal monitoring programs to determine if they are leaking and that 5 SSTs no longer meet the criteria for interim stabilization, i.e. pumpable liquid in the tanks has been removed to prevent future leakage of waste into the ground. DOE's response has simply been to monitor these questionable tanks more often while resisting efforts by the State of Washington and the State of Oregon for an enforceable schedule for removing waste from the SSTs as required in the Hanford Tri-Party Agreement and Consent Decree.³

Increased monitoring is a necessary, but not sufficient response to the deteriorating condition of the Hanford tanks. As GAO reported, DOE has limited options for remedial actions because it lacks tank space and treatment capacity to handle the waste in these aging tanks. Indeed, AY-102 was expected to be used as one of the tanks for staging waste for processing in the now significantly delayed Waste Treatment Plant. Rather than helping reduce the risks from high-level waste, AY-102 has now added to that problem.

The passage of time only makes these challenges more complicated. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Ron Wyden
United State Senator

³ State of Washington and State of Oregon v. Ernest Moniz, United States District Court, Eastern District of Washington, No. 2:08-cv-050585-RMP