To expand communications between Washington and California, the California Institute provides periodic news bulletins regarding current activity on Capitol Hill and other information that directly impacts the state. Bulletins are published weekly during sessions of Congress, and occasionally during other periods.

**Education: Senate Help Committee Completes Mark up of ESEA Reauthorization Bill**

On October 20, 2011, the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee reported an amended bill intended to replace No Child Left Behind and reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The panel passed the bill late last Thursday night, by a vote of 15-7.

Chairman Tom Harkin (IA) expressed his belief that both parties in the Senate and House would rather complete NCLB reform in Congress, rather than through "waivers by the administration." Furthermore, he expressed hope that the bill would be heard on the Senate floor by the Thanksgiving holiday and also stated that he expects that the House could quickly act on a bipartisan bill. Ranking Member Michael B. Enzi (WY) stated, "today's markup of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was an important first step, but we still have a lot of work to do when the bill reaches the floor of the Senate… we must keep working in order to have true bipartisan education reform."

In general, the bill's biggest departure from NCLB is the removal of the current law's accountability system, which requires all students to be proficient in math and reading by the year 2014. This means departure from concepts such as "adequate yearly progress" and, according to Chairman Harkin, "mandated federal sanctions for all schools that create pressure to 'teach to the test'." In place of this system, states would be required to develop and adopt standards that produce graduates "ready for college and careers." Statewide accountability systems would be required for states to receive federal education funding.

Throughout the mark up process last week, Sen. Rand Paul (KY) expressed concern that the Committee had not been given enough time to initially review the 860-page bill, and engaged in parliamentary maneuvers to delay the markup, until he accepted an agreement offered by Harkin and Enzi to hold a hearing between reporting the bill from Committee and its consideration on the floor. That hearing has been tentatively scheduled for November 8, 2011.

A total of 144 amendments were originally filed on the bill, but by the end of the mark up far less had been considered, with a total of 20 withdrawn, 10 defeated, and 24 passed.
Options for School Restructuring

One major amendment was offered by Sen. Lamar Alexander (TN). Under current NCLB law, school districts must implement school intervention strategies in failing schools identified for restructuring. These strategies are outlined in the law, but the law also provides an "other" option, which school districts can use to design an approach they feel is appropriate for the school(s) in question. In the new legislation, school districts, with some exceptions for rural schools, would have to choose from six set options for the lowest 5-percent of schools. Sen. Alexander's amendment is akin to allowing for an "other" option, except the amendment allows the states to propose "other" options to the Department of Education, which then would have to give final approval before implementation.

Sen. Alexander argued that this option gives states more flexibility, but also allows for oversight. He also made clear that the amendment was not intended to address the concept of school vouchers. Chairman Harkin questioned whether the proposals made by states would be sufficiently proven through evidence, and that this may be complicated by the fact that approximately 75-percent of all schools currently choose the "other" option. Despite the Chairman's opposition, the amendment passed 15-7. It had the support of the National Education Association.

Teacher Qualifications

The Committee also reviewed a proposed amendment introduced by Sen. Bernard Sanders (VT), concerning "highly qualified teachers." The amendment would require districts receiving federal funding to identify any teachers who are not fully certified, and to have those in question formally overseen and mentored by master teachers, who would be both fully certified and highly experienced. Sen. Sanders argued that "when the term 'highly qualified' applies to 98 percent of teachers, it loses its meaning." Sen. Michael Bennet (CO) opposed the proposal, citing concerns that it would "kill" Teach for America and other similar alternative certification programs. Sen. Bennet stated that he believes the focus should be on "longevity" and teacher effectiveness instead of certification. The amendment was rejected by a vote of 3-18.

Improving Secondary Schools Program

Sen. Richard Blumenthal (CT) offered an amendment to mandate that grants from the new Improving Secondary Schools program be used for experience-based opportunities (i.e. apprenticeships, internships, and job shadowing). After several Committee members expressed support for the concept, Sen. Blumenthal and Chairman Harkin agreed to work together to refine the amendment and include it in the manager's amendment considered on the Senate floor.

Assessments for Students with Disabilities

Sen. Johnny Isakson (GA) proposed an amendment that would allow states to use modified academic achievement standards when assessing students with disabilities. His proposal would also have removed the current law's cap on the number of students with significant disabilities that are permitted to be evaluated using different assessments than their non-disabled peers. Sen. Isakson stated that the amendment "would empower the individual child with disabilities." But Chairman Harkin was opposed, saying, "special education does not mean that [these students] need a different education...they need additional tools."
also expressed fear that the proposal could take more disabled students out of the normal classroom, creating isolation. The amendment was defeated by a vote of 8-14.

Other Amendments
Sen. Rand Paul initially offered over 70 amendments. Two were symbolically significant. The first was defeated 3-17; it would have formally repealed NCLB and would have required federal education law be carried out as if that legislation was never passed. The other amendment, which proposed making all of the bill's mandates voluntary, was defeated by a vote of 1-20.

The panel also approved other amendments by voice votes, including the following:
- regarding the replacement of principals in school improvement strategies
- making an application part of the Improving Secondary Schools program
- mandating that annual report cards for certain grants include cross-tabulated data
- exempting certain American Indian, Alaska Native or Native Hawaiian history teachers from teacher qualification requirements for the purposes of preserving these groups' native languages

The bill as amended was passed by a vote of 15-7.

For more information, please visit: http://help.senate.gov/.

Appropriations: Senate Postpones Minibus Vote Until November
After working on its first “Minibus” appropriations bill during the week of October 17, 2001, the Senate postponed final consideration of the bill, H.R. 2112, until it returns from a week long recess the week of October 31ª. The Minibus consolidates the FY12 appropriations for: the Department of Agriculture; Commerce, Justice, Science; and the Departments of Transportation and Housing and Urban Development.

For action taken on the Senate floor, go to: http://www.calinst.org/bul2/b1832.shtml#TOC1_1

The California Institute has prepared reports on the individual bills as reported by the Senate Appropriations Committee, which are available on its website:


Taxes: House Passes Bill Eliminating Contractor Withholding Requirement
On October 27, 2011, the House, by an overwhelmingly bipartisan vote of 405-16, passed H.R. 674, sponsored by Rep. Wally Herger (Marysville). The bill eliminates a tax law requiring the withholding of three percent of payments made to contractors providing services to federal, state, and local governmental entities.

The law was originally enacted in 2005 and was aimed at improving tax compliance by government contractors, but it was never enforced. As part of the 2009 stimulus bill, Congress deferred its implementation by one year and earlier this year the IRS, in a rulemaking, further delayed implementation until the start of 2013. Rep. Herger and supporters of the repeal stress that allowing the requirement to take effect would impede job creation because it would constrict the cash flow of thousands of government contractors.

The expected lost revenue of $11 billion over ten years from repealing the proposal will be offset by tightening up the eligibility rules for insurance subsidies under the Affordable Care Act. The vote on that was 262-157.

For more information, go to: http://waysandmeans.house.gov.
NASA: House Committee Examines NASA's Commercial Crew Development Program

On October 26, 2011, the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology held a hearing titled NASA’s Commercial Crew Development Program: Accomplishments and Challenges.

Witnesses were: Mr. John Elbon, Vice President & General Manager, Space Exploration Division, The Boeing Company; Mr. Steve Lindsey, Director, Space Exploration, Sierra Nevada Space Systems; Mr. Elon Musk, CEO & CTO, Space Exploration Technologies; Mr. Charles Precourt, Vice President and General Manager, ATK Space Launch Systems; Dr. George Sowers, Vice President, Business Development and Advanced Programs, United Launch Alliance; The Honorable Paul K. Martin, Inspector General, NASA; and Mr. Bill Gerstenmaier, Associate Administrator, Human Exploration and Operations Mission Directorate, NASA.

The purpose of the hearing was to provide aerospace companies and NASA an opportunity to testify about progress being made toward the goal of establishing a purely commercial capability to fly humans to and from low Earth orbit, with an initial emphasis on ferrying NASA astronauts to the International Space Station. In his opening remarks, Committee Chair Ralph Hall (TX) stated that he was “not opposed to this new approach” but is concerned due to "the very thin evidence provided to date by NASA that this new business model is well understood and that it can succeed." Ranking Member Eddie Bernice Johnson (TX) also expressed concern for the viability of the business model, stating that due to the economic climate, she must be more certain than ever that the benefits of the program will outweigh the costs and thus be a good use of taxpayer money.

Mr. Elbon testified that, assuming stable funding and the limitation of liability (indemnification), Boeing would be ready to launch humans into low orbit by 2015 using mostly proven "off the shelf" technology – an Apollo shaped capsule launched using an Atlas V rocket. He also stated that Boeing had centered its business model on the assumption that NASA would be its only customer; although private demand is likely from foreign astronauts, tourists, cargo, and other interests, it is not measurable as a market at this time.

Mr. Lindsey described Sierra Nevada Space Systems' DreamChaser design, and noted that with the right funding and set requirements, he believes the private industry can supply the need for human transport on time and within budget and "never ever sacrifice safety."

Mr. Musk testified about SpaceX's Dragon design and estimated that he "would be disappointed" if it took more than three years from the date of the hearing to put humans back in space using commercial transport. He also testified that because the Dragon uses the same capsule as his company's cargo transits, which are already being used successfully in space to deliver supplies to the International Space Station (ISS), the cost of development is lower.

Mr. Precourt introduced ATK's Liberty launch vehicle, showing that the vehicle is compatible with all types of human and cargo capsules currently under design and consideration. He estimates that ATK can complete test flights within three years with the proper funding and emphasized the demonstrated safety of the Liberty.

Mr. Sowers testified about the three main reasons he believes that the U.S. government should invest in commercial crew transport: 1) it addresses an urgent need, and eliminates the U.S.'s dependence on Russia for access to the ISS; 2) the private sector can offer safety with better monetary efficiency than the public sector; and 3) investment will spur a new industry, creating entrepreneurship and innovation. He believes his company would be ready for test flights in 2014 and operational flights in 2015.

In response to questions, all of the industry witnesses expressed confidence that they can proceed with their projects even if NASA is the only customer, although they do not believe that would be the case. On justifying the costs of the program, Mr. Musk testified that it would cost about $20 million per astronaut
in commercialized transport, compared to the $60 million paid to Russia per astronaut. Mr. Sowers added that the spending was justified to protect all of the U.S.’s past investments in the ISS. Rep. Zoe Lofgren (San Jose) stated that the pay off for investment could be enormous if the U.S. was willing to accept the risk, and asked what Congress could do to accelerate the timeline for operation (currently set for 2017). Mr. Lindsey testified that stable funding would make that possible, while Mr. Precourt cited current problems with the supply chain and Mr. Sowers said his launch vehicles are "ready" as soon as a passenger capsule is approved.

On behalf of NASA, Mr. Martin discussed the report of the Office of Inspector General (OIG) released earlier this summer and the challenges it said NASA must focus on:
- modifying NASA's existing safety and human-rating requirements for commercially developed systems;
- managing its acquisition strategy for commercial crew transportation services;
- implementing the appropriate insight/oversight model for commercial partner vehicle development;
- relying on an emerging industry and uncertain market conditions to achieve cost savings;
- managing the relationship between commercial partners, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), and NASA.

In his testimony, Mr. Gerstenmaier acknowledged the Inspector General's report, as well as the challenges of financing and risk to private industry, but urged Congress "to provide robust funding" for the initiative. He said the companies' success is “critical to ensuring that we re-establish an American capability to transport U.S. astronauts – and their cargo – to the ISS and quickly end the outsourcing of this work to foreign governments. And they need robust funding from NASA to achieve timely success in this critical endeavor.”

The Senate’s FY12 Commerce, Justice, Science appropriations (H.R. 2112/S. 1572) provides $500 million for NASA’s commercial human spaceflight program, while the House bill, H.R. 2596, would provide $312 million. The Administration’s request was for $850 million.

For more information, visit: http://science.house.gov.

HOUSING: ADMINISTRATION ANNOUNCES REFINANCING PLAN TO ASSIST UNDERWATER HOMEOWNERS

On October 24, 2011, President Obama announced a plan to help homeowners who owe more on their mortgages than their homes are worth. The refinancing plan will be administered by the Federal Home Finance Agency (FHFA), an independent regulator that manages the publically-backed mortgage companies Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac.

The plan itself is a revision of the Home Affordable Refinance Program (HARP), which was established at the beginning of the Administration. The new plan is expected to help about one million of the country’s underwater homeowners refinance their loans.

Unlike the previous version of HARP, under the new plan there will be no cut off on how much a homeowner can owe to be eligible, fees will be reduced, and banks who participate will be less liable. However, only homeowners who have loans with or guaranteed by Fannie Mae or Freddie Mac will be able to participate and those who have missed payments in the last year will be ineligible.

According to the FHFA, those who owe more than their house is worth “will be able to reduce the balance owed much faster if they take advantage of today’s low interest rates by shortening the term of their mortgage.” It is also the hope that homeowners could have more discretionary income outside of their monthly mortgage to spend in other sectors of the economy, thus countering the drag that the poor housing market has on the economy as a whole. However, some industry experts estimate the average annual
savings for borrowers could be as low as $312, while the Administration estimates the savings to be about $2,500, depending on up-front fees like closing costs.

The program will serve about one-tenth of the nation’s 10 million homeowners who are underwater. Although the Administration cites the program as a step in the right direction, the President has said that the plan “will not solve all the problems in the housing market.”

For more information, please visit: http://www.fhfa.gov/ or http://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room.

EDUCATION: HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE EXAMINES DIRECT STUDENT LOAN ACCOUNTABILITY

The House Education and Workforce Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Training held a hearing titled Government-Run Student Loans: Ensuring the Direct Loan Program is Accountable to Students and Taxpayers on October 25, 2011.

Witnesses included: Mr. James W. Runcie, Chief Operating Officer, Office of Federal Student Aid, U.S. Department of Education, Washington, DC; Mr. Ron H. Day, Director of Financial Aid, Kennesaw State University, Kennesaw, GA; Ms. Nancy Hoover, Director of Financial Aid, Denison University, Granville, OH; and Mr. Mark A. Bandré, Vice President for Enrollment Management and Student Affairs, Baker University, Baldwin City, Kansas.

Chairwoman Virginia Foxx expressed concern that the decision to eliminate private lenders in the federal student loan market and turn the program over to direct federal lending has had adverse consequences for students and higher education institutions in terms of default rates and customer service. She also noted that “in fiscal year 2012, [the Department of Education] is expected to originate $124 billion in student loans.”

Mr. Runcie testified that the Department of Education’s transition from the Federal Family Education Loan (FFEL) Loan Purchase Programs to the William D. Ford Federal Direct Loan Program was a success. The Department made “$102.2 billion in Direct Loans to 11.5 million recipients during academic year 2010-2011” and today services more than 5,000 domestic schools and 400 foreign schools. He also highlighted the fact that “the number of schools entering the Direct Loan Program increased by 52 percent in the nineteen months prior to the . . . release of President Obama’s 2010 budget proposal to originate all Stafford, PLUS and Consolidation loans via a single loan program.”

Due to the increase, the Department took steps to “ensure Federal Student Aid had the capacity to assume additional Direct Loan volume” and in 2008 they “increased the Direct Loan origination capacity of our Common Origination and Disbursement system.” By 2009, they had awarded “four loan servicing contracts” to “private sector companies – Nelnet Servicing, LLC; Great Lakes Educational Program Loan Services, Inc; SLM Corporation (Sallie Mae); and the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency.” Mr. Runcie testified that “these contracts provided the Department with the capacity necessary to support the anticipated increase in the number of loans owned by the Department” and the “structure of these contracts ensures that borrowers will receive the highest quality of service at the lowest possible cost to the taxpayer.” He also stated that the Department had taken extensive steps to prepare schools and assist them in the transition, including the addition of “a comprehensive training plan,” webinars, and newsletters by October 2009.

Mr. Day ultimately agreed with Mr. Runcie that the transition was a success. He testified that although his student borrowers did experience “bumps and challenges,” the transition was successful “with the assistance of workshops, colleagues, manuals, and the U. S. Department of Education” and that the “students did not experience insurmountable struggles or roadblocks.” He also offered some suggestions for the Program’s improvement, including better and more accurate data reporting, more college access and
default prevention materials and assistance, and increased standardization of loan servicing. Mr. Bandré also stated that despite some difficulties, he feels that “the Direct Loan program is working” for his students.

For more information, please visit: http://edworkforce.house.gov/.

TRADE: HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE EXAMINES THE IMPORTANCE OF SEA PORTS TO THE U.S. ECONOMY

The House Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Water Resources and the Environment held a hearing on October 26, 2011 titled "The Economic Importance of Sea Ports: Is the United States Prepared for 21st Century Trade Realities?.”

Witnesses included: The Honorable Jo Ellen Darcy, Assistant Secretary of the Army-Civil Works, U.S. Department of the Army; Mr. Jerry Bridges, Chairman of the Board, American Association of Port Authorities; Mr. Christopher Koch, President, World Shipping Council; Mr. Paul Anderson, Chief Executive Office, Jacksonville Port Authority; Mr. Omar Benjamin, Executive Director, Port of Oakland; Mr. William Friedman, President and Chief Executive Office, Cleveland-Cuyahoga County Port Authority; and Mr. Peter Peyton, President, ILWU Marine Clerks Association.

Ms. Darcy began her testimony by highlighting the role that the Army Corps of Engineers plays in the U.S. ports and shipping system. She stated that Corps invests over $1.5 billion yearly in maintaining and improving ports. To improve the system, she stated that the Corps is working actively with the Department of Transportation in coordination and decision-making efforts, deepening port channels, and improving port maintenance. She also cited the ports of Los Angeles, Long Beach, and Oakland as already having the desired port channel depth of fifty feet.

Mr. Benjamin testified that the Port of Oakland is vital to the California economy, and that the port is the third busiest container port on the U.S. west coast. He also noted that the port is especially involved in exporting agricultural products from California's San Joaquin Valley; a total of $7.1 billion is shipped out of the Port of Oakland annually. In addition, Mr. Benjamin testified that ports "distribute their economic impact throughout the nation" and highlighted that over 70,000 jobs in northern California and over 800,000 total throughout the country are affected by the Port of Oakland. Individual states are also affected; for example, the state of Ohio alone shipped over $385 million in goods through the Port last year. Mr. Benjamin also testified that Canada and Mexico are creating "comprehensive national freight shipping systems" through heavy investment in infrastructure and direction from their national governments, systems that are designed to compete with U.S. west coast ports. He cautioned that the "U.S. stands to lose tax revenue and jobs" without a federal strategy and that the industry needs a "partner in the federal government." In the absence of a unified national directive, he stated the U.S. west coast ports have formed alliances and public-private partnerships, like the Port of Oakland has done.

For more information, please see: http://transportation.house.gov/.

EDUCATION: ADMINISTRATION ANNOUNCES NEW PLAN FOR STUDENT LOAN RELIEF

On Wednesday October 26, 2011, President Obama announced a new student loan plan as part of his "We Can't Wait" economic strategy. The plan is slated to begin in January, two months before it was scheduled to become active under federal law. It will allow student loan borrowers to cap monthly loan payments at 10-percent of their discretionary income. In addition, the new plan, to be implemented through the President’s executive authority, will also help borrowers reduce their interest rates on federal loans, as well as consolidate those loans. The plan will also change the federal law's loan forgiveness rules and now, the President said, all remaining federal student loan debt would be forgiven after 20 years of repayment (the federal law had mandated loan forgiveness after 25 years).

According to the White House, the plan also calls for "The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau and the Department of Education … to launch a new 'Know Before You Owe' project aimed at creating a
model financial aid disclosure form, which colleges and universities could use to help students better understand the type and amount of aid they qualify for and easily compare aid packages offered by different institutions. This 'Financial Aid Shopping Sheet' makes the costs and risks of student loans clear upfront - before students have enrolled - outlining their total estimated student loan debt, monthly loan payments after graduation and additional costs not covered by federal aid."

The Administration has stated that the "Pay As You Earn" plan, as it is calling the new program, could be utilized by over 1.6 million student borrowers, who could save hundreds of dollars per month in reduced payments.


RESOURCES: HOUSE COMMITTEE HOLDS OVERSIGHT HEARING ON THE PRESIDENT'S NEW NATIONAL OCEAN POLICY

The House Committee on Natural Resources held a hearing on October 26, 2011 titled The President's New National Ocean Policy - A Plan for Further Restrictions on Ocean, Coastal and Inland Activities.

Witnesses included: Ms. Nancy Sutley, Chair, U.S. Council on Environmental Quality, Co-Chair, National Ocean Council; Dr. Jane Lubchenco, Under Secretary of Commerce, Oceans and Atmosphere Administrator, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration; Mr. Jim Donofrio, Executive Director, Recreational Fishing Alliance; Mr. Randall Luthi, President, National Ocean Industries Association; and Mr. Michael Conathan, Director of Ocean Policy, Center for American Progress.

According to the Committee, the "hearing is the second hearing to focus on the National Ocean Policy and the Coastal and Marine Spatial Planning initiative," the first having occurred on October 4, 2011. Chairman Doc Hastings (WA) stated that the "President's Executive Order creates a new federal bureaucracy that requires regional plans to be created whether states want it or not and in a manner that excludes stakeholders." Furthermore, the Chairman said that he had "asked the Administration for the specific statutory authority that allows the President, by Executive Order, to create Regional Planning Bodies..." and had "not been given a concise, direct answer." He went on to say that "instead of getting input and statutory authorization from Congress" the President not only added more bureaucracy, but instituted "ocean zoning" and other laws that could reach far inland and have unknown costs and litigation avenues.

Ms. Sutley countered the Chairman's remarks, stating: "The National Ocean Policy responds to [current shortcomings in ocean policy] with a measured, iterative approach to designing a better decision system for our oceans. Built upon the findings of the two Commissions, and congressional, State, and regional efforts over the past decade, the new ocean policy lays out a process for Federal agencies, States, and stakeholders to collaboratively improve decision-making in a manner customized to the unique needs and desires of each region."

She also stated that Coastal and Marine Spatial Zoning has "been mischaracterized as 'ocean zoning'." She noted the following: "The Policy provides a framework for collaborative, regionally based coastal and marine spatial planning that would be developed jointly with … substantial public input… It is a science-based tool that provides transparent information about ocean use, guarantees the public and stakeholders a voice early on in decisions affecting the ocean, and creates an inclusive, bottom-up, regional
planning approach that gives the Federal Government, States, tribes, and regions the ability to make more informed decisions about how best to use and protect the ocean, coasts, and Great Lakes.

“It does not have a regulatory effect similar to terrestrial zoning that many are familiar with. The National Ocean Policy does not impose any restrictions on ocean, coastal, or Great Lakes activities… does not direct that any area be designated for a specific use or be off limits to specific activities. The National Ocean Policy's goals and guiding principles for coastal and marine spatial planning expressly recognize public access and the need to ensure the sustainability of ocean and coastal economies, and provide support for a growing number of important activities, including recreation, science, commerce, transportation, energy development, and national security.”

Dr. Lubchenco testified that she believes that the Policy enables "cross-agency and regional efforts" that "are contributing to a healthy economy, promoting efficiency and certainty for decision-making, providing data and information, and inspiring partnerships."

Michael Conathan testified in support of the Policy, and was in agreement with Ms. Sutley regarding spatial planning, while Mr. Donofrio testified against it. Donofrio stated "the resultant negative impacts on the marine recreational fishing industry and coastal economies … will cause significant instability in our industry … [and] will stifle job growth." Mr. Randall Luthi also testified against the Policy, saying the "NOIA believes there are ample policy and statutory tools to ensure that ocean resources are conserved and protected and that potential conflicts are managed without imposing a cumbersome new layer of federal bureaucracy."

Mr. Gerstenmaier testified that the companies' success is "critical to ensuring that we re-establish an American capability to transport U.S. astronauts - and their cargo - to the ISS and quickly end the outsourcing of this work to foreign governments. And they need robust funding from NASA, to achieve timely success in this critical endeavor, he stressed.


**ENERGY: HOUSE HOLDS JOINT SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING ON AMERICA’S NUCLEAR FUTURE**

On October 27, 2011, the House Science, Space, and Technology Subcommittees on Investigations and Oversight and Energy and the Environment held a hearing to review the draft recommendations and findings of the *Blue Ribbon Commission on America’s Nuclear Future*.

Witnesses included: Mr. Jack Spencer, Research Fellow, Nuclear Energy Policy, Heritage Foundation; Dr. Peter Swift, Distinguished Member of the Technical Staff, Sandia National Laboratory; Dr. Roger Kasperson, Professor and Distinguished Scientist, Clark University; Mr. Gary Hollis, Chairman, Nye County Board of County Commissioners; Mr. Rick McLeod, Executive Director, Savannah River Site Reuse Organization; and Dr. Mark Peters, Deputy Laboratory Director for Programs, Argonne National Laboratory.

Dr. Swift agreed with the Commission’s “draft recommendation regarding the need for a permanent geological repository,” saying, “alternative approaches to the nuclear fuel cycle that involve separating and recycling fissile material … will not eliminate the need” for geological waste disposal. Additionally, he testified that he concurs with the Commission’s finding that “deep geological disposal is the most promising and accepted method currently available” and that “prompt efforts to develop one or more geologic disposal facilities” are needed.

Other topics addressed included:
- the main issues in nuclear waste disposal in the U.S., including discussion about the lack of geological depositories, the removal of waste depository responsibilities from waste producers, and pricing issues for depository services rendered.
- whether waste management should be handled by the Department of Energy or by a public corporation, as is done in other countries.
- the need to decide the location of depositories by consent rather than coercion, as much as the geological suitability allows.

For more information, see http://science.house.gov/.