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## United States Senate

**COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0650**

November 15, 1995

The Honorable Hazel R. O'Leary  
Secretary of Energy  
Washington, D.C. 20585-1000

Dear Secretary O'Leary:

Two letters addressed to you on November 15, 1993 by John Conway, the Chairman of the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (DNFSB) have come to my attention. These letters express the Board's concern that its formal Recommendation #94-1, dated May 26, 1994, is not being implemented by the Department of Energy (DOE). Furthermore, the Board has been informed that actions contrary to that Recommendation are now under discussion within DOE. This Recommendation deals with the chemical processing of spent nuclear fuel in the Canyons at the Savannah River Site (SRS). The Recommendation also emphasizes the need to maintain the Canyon facilities at SRS to do such processing in both the near- and long-term. Mr. Conway points out that on August 31, 1994, you accepted Recommendation #94-1 in its entirety.

Mr. Conway's letter states, "In the Board's view, the Department of Energy will always need to have available a capability for chemical processing of spent nuclear fuel, since this is the only proven safe way by which the highly radioactive material can be converted into a form suitable for ultimate geological disposal. This means that the capability now existing at Savannah River continues to be essential". In spite of this, and in spite of DOE's acceptance of Recommendation #94-1, Mr. Conway states that the Board has been informed that there is advocacy in some quarters of the Department that would close these essential facilities. "I am dismayed that some DOE officials are apparently undermining an independent safety recommendation which you as Secretary of Energy accepted over a year ago.

Mr. Conway also cautions the Department that deferring the decision to chemically treat Mark 16/22 fuel and similar material while investigating dry storage is likely to increase safety concerns at the site. I share Mr. Conway's concern and I endorse his recommendation that the Department move immediately to

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SEN. THURMOND

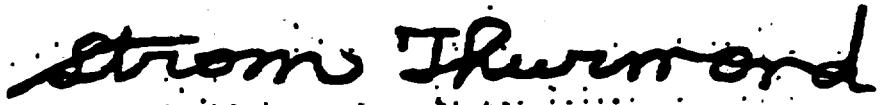
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chemically treat this material. Savannah River cannot become a site where spent nuclear fuel rods are sent for an indefinite period of time.

I trust that you will respond promptly to Mr. Conway by reiterating your full and complete acceptance of the Board's Recommendation #94-1. This reassurance is necessary not only for Mr. Conway, but for the people of South Carolina. To fail to do so would further bring into question the Department's credibility.

I also urge you to closely examine the work and actions of DOE officials who recommend delaying or thwarting full compliance with Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board Recommendation #94-1.

Sincerely yours,



Strom Thurmond, Chairman  
Senate Armed Services Committee

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For Immediate Release

## **THURMOND TELLS O'LEARY TO HEED BOARD STUDY**

WASHINGTON, NOVEMBER 16, 1995—Senator Strom Thurmond (R-SC) today called on Secretary of Energy Hazel O'Leary to heed the advice of the Defense Nuclear Facilities Board and keep open two facilities at the Savannah River Site capable of treating spent nuclear fuel.

In a letter to O'Leary, Thurmond cited two letters that John Conway, Chairman of the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board, sent the Secretary on November 15 urging her to ignore recommendations made by members of her staff that the "F" and "H" Canyons at SRS be closed.

"These two canyons are the only facilities that remain in the United States that are capable of treating spent nuclear fuels," said Thurmond. "It makes absolutely no sense that the Secretary would even consider closing the canyons and I sincerely hope that she is not paying attention to the misguided advice of some of her staff."

Thurmond reminded O'Leary that in 1994 she accepted the Defense Nuclear Facility Safety Board's recommendation that the canyons remain open.

A copy of Thurmond's letter follows this release.

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**FAX TRANSMITTAL**

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<b>To:</b>	<b>From:</b>
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