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As the New York State government filed a lawsuit related to disagreements with the Department of Energy regarding cleanup at the West Valley Demonstration Project, Ray Vaughan, a member of the West Valley Citizen Task Force (CTF) testified at a Public Meeting before the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) on The Status of Decommissioning Activities. The Commission is reviewing the decommissioning status of the West Valley Demonstration Project and other sites.

Raymond Vaughan, a member of the CTF since its inception almost ten years ago, spoke on behalf of the CTF to the NRC Commissioners at their December 11th Public Meeting in Rockville, Maryland. Mr. Vaughan repeated the Task Force's position that radioactive material can not be left indefinitely at the West Valley site, based on present knowledge of site conditions. These conditions include the site's unusual susceptibility to failure due to uncontrolled erosion, the quantities of long-lived radionuclides in the onsite tanks and burial grounds, and the general recognition by involved agencies that the site is vulnerable to erosion.

He urged the Commissioners to consider or reconsider certain steps that will be needed for safe closure of the site. Among these steps are serious issues regarding the distinction between decommissioning and disposal, reactivation of the site license, the rules for near-surface burial of radioactive waste, DOE's reclassification of high-level waste as "incidental to reprocessing", and NRC's apparent reluctance to deal with the radioactive groundwater plume.

Citing the Environmental Protection Agency's high ranking of the Cattaraugus Creek watershed within the eastern Great Lakes area, Mr. Vaughan reiterated the CTF commitment to work together for the sake of all residents of Western New York, the Seneca Nation of Indians and residents of nearby Canada for site closure that would be truly protective of public health and the environment for years to come.

While expressing regret that the state government had to resort to litigation to move the project ahead, the CTF continues to talk with other agencies, such as NRC, which are involved in decisions to be made for a proper cleanup.