

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-4402

April 25, 2012

The Honorable Steven Chu
Secretary
U.S. Department of Energy
Forrestal Building
1000 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20585-0800

Dear Secretary Chu,

I am writing about the status of the Department of Energy's Moab tailings remediation project. As you know, since work at the site began in February 2009, five million of the sixteen million tons of radioactive mill tailings have been safely removed. However, there is still a long road ahead if cleanup is to be completed by its statutory deadline of 2019, a requirement of language I successfully incorporated in the Fiscal Year 2008 National Defense Authorization Act.

I was very disappointed when the Administration recently awarded a five-year contract for removal of only 3.1 million tons of tailings. The scope of work outlined in the contract does not come close to the level of cleanup required to complete the project on time. In fact, under the terms of this contract, work would not be completed for another seventeen years.

I am also concerned that work will only occur at the site nine months out of the year under the new contract. Previously, work occurred at the site year-round. The Administration's decision to use a seasonal work schedule is not an efficient way to manage taxpayer dollars. Moreover, it is my understanding that more than 25% of the project's funds will go to a Department field office located offsite for oversight of the project and will not go towards tailings removal. While oversight is certainly a legitimate use of funds, using one out of every four tax dollars to oversee work that is being done only nine months out of the year appears excessive to me.

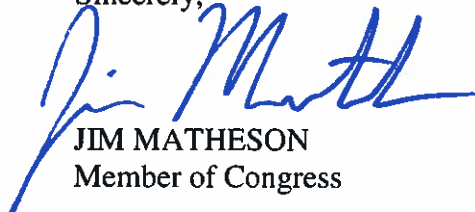
I understand that there are many sites around the country where environmental cleanup funds are needed. An important characteristic of the Moab project is that there is an end in sight, and I believe an aggressive effort to complete the removal will be a more fiscally prudent use of taxpayer funds. In other words, fixed administrative costs take place year after year, but if more funds go into actual tailings removal, it will take fewer years to complete the project and total administrative costs would be less.

With these concerns in mind, I ask the following questions:

1. Does the Administration intend to meet the congressionally mandated 2019 deadline for completion of the Moab project? Is so, how does the Administration intend to meet the deadline? If not, why not?
2. What is the justification for a seasonal work schedule in the current contract where work takes place nine months out of a year as opposed to the prior contract where work took place twelve months of a year?
3. Is the 25% overhead component under the current contract comparable with other DOE environmental cleanup projects?
4. Does the Administration acknowledge that a greater rate of tailings removal will reduce the length of the project and offer savings in total administrative costs?
5. Is there any opportunity for the Administration to reallocate funds to more efficiently and effectively make progress on the Moab project?

I remain committed to working with you to ensure that the tailings removal in Moab is carried out in a safe, environmentally-sound, and timely manner. I look forward to your response to my questions.

Sincerely,



JIM MATHESON
Member of Congress

cc: Environmental Management Consolidated Business Center, Cincinnati, OH