

ONE HUNDRED TWELFTH CONGRESS  
**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE  
2125 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING  
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6115

Majority (202) 225-2927  
Minority (202) 225-3641

March 14, 2011

The Honorable Fred Upton  
Chairman  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2125 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Ed Whitfield  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Energy and Power  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2125 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Cliff Stearns  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2125 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Upton, Chairman Whitfield, and Chairman Stearns:

The worsening nuclear crisis in Japan is raising serious questions in the minds of many Americans about the safety and preparedness of nuclear power plants in the United States. We request that the Committee conduct an investigation and hold hearings to examine this issue.

The nuclear industry has downplayed the significance of the events in Japan. Over the weekend, a spokesman for the Nuclear Energy Institute, the industry's lobbying organization, said: "Obviously, any time you have an incident at a nuclear plant that involves any kind of

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damage or an explosion, it's not good. ... But in the scheme of things, is it a disaster? We don't think so."<sup>1</sup>

The nuclear industry has also asserted that it is far better prepared to respond to a nuclear accident than the oil industry was in responding to the blowout of BP's Macondo well. The vice president of nuclear operations for the Nuclear Energy Institute stated: "The problem with the BP event is that they didn't have a Plan B. ... We have, I would say, sufficient defense in depth. We have Plan B, C, D and possibly E."<sup>2</sup>

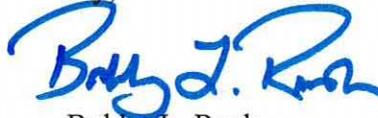
We hope the nuclear industry's self-confidence is warranted, but we should not accept the industry's assurances without conducting our own independent evaluation of the risks posed by nuclear reactors in the United States and the preparedness of industry and regulators to respond to those risks. This is especially important given that the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) is actively considering license applications for new nuclear power plants, as well as renewal licenses for older existing reactors. In recent years, the NRC has approved over 60 license renewal applications, including several for plants with the same design as the endangered Japanese facilities. In fact, the NRC recently voted to renew the operating license for the Vermont Yankee nuclear plant, which is of the same design as some of the reactors experiencing severe problems in Japan.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to working with you to assure the safety and preparedness of the nation's nuclear reactors.

Sincerely,



Henry A. Waxman  
Ranking Member



Bobby L. Rush  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Energy  
and Power



Diana DeGette  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Oversight  
and Investigations



Edward Markey  
Member of Congress

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<sup>1</sup> *Japan's Aging Nuclear Reactor Hit Hard*, Washington Post (Mar. 12, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*