

USW NEWS

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Kentucky and Ohio USW Leaders Testify on Uranium Enrichment Jobs During Hearing by U.S. House Subcommittee on Energy and Power

Washington, D.C.-Two United Steelworkers Union (USW) local union leaders from the Paducah, Ky., and Portsmouth, Ohio, nuclear facilities testified today before the House Subcommittee on Energy and Power to advocate for measures that will create and save jobs, while raising revenue for the federal treasury.

Testifying were USW Local 550 Vice President Jim H. Key, representing 1,000 union workers employed at the Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant, and Herman R. Potter, USW Local 689 President, for 850 USW members at the U.S. Department of Energy's uranium enrichment facility in Portsmouth.

Legislation to mandate a re-enrichment project has been introduced in the U.S. House by Rep. Ed Whitfield (R-KY). USW is working with members of Congress to see if a legislative mandate can be constructed to preserve the jobs in Paducah and provide equity for the workers in Portsmouth.

Earlier this year, USW President Leo W. Gerard wrote to DOE Secretary Steven Chu: "The Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant is scheduled to be retired as the USEC Advanced Centrifuge Plant begins fuel enrichment operations. If DOE authorizes a pilot program for re-enrichment of the tails, it could preserve the 1,200 jobs in Paducah, which include 580 USW members, and the 770 decontamination and decommissioning cleanup jobs at Portsmouth."

The depleted uranium is in the form of what is called leftover 'tails' of uranium hexafluoride from the enrichment process. There are currently 40,000 depleted uranium hexafluoride cylinders of tails located at the Paducah uranium enrichment plant and 20,000 located at the Portsmouth, facility. The tails are currently scheduled to be converted to a stable chemical form, primarily uranium oxide, at depleted uranium facilities in Paducah and Portsmouth. However, the tails contain useable uranium that can be re-enriched by the gaseous diffusion plant in Paducah.

Local 550 Vice President Key testified, "This issue is critically important to the members of Local 550 in that it provides the best opportunity to extend our production jobs at the Paducah > plant, at a time when manufacturing employment is at record lows and the regional economy is still sputtering to recover from the nationwide recession, as shown in the latest jobs report."

Key added: "Economically this project makes sense. First, it will convert what is currently a liability, the depleted tails, into an asset that will generate revenue for the government. The DOE

is obligated to clean up its sites, such as the Paducah site and the Portsmouth site, both which hold depleted tails. If these tails are not put to good use, they will represent an added cost of clean-up to DOE."

Joining in support of the project was Local 689 President Potter, who testified: "The value of the material, due to the rise in price of natural uranium, has provided an opportunity for re-enrichment to take place, eventually returning a monetary value back to the DOE, allowing it to easily meet its obligations to the work force and the communities where these DOE sites exist."

Potter said, "The sale of re-enriched material would generate approximately \$500 million dollars. The total net value of the tails has been calculated to be as much as \$4 billion dollars."

The complete testimony of Key and Potter is available at www.usw.org. The USW is the largest industrial union in North America with 850,000 members. It represents workers employed in metals, rubber, chemicals, paper and mining, plus the energy sectors of oil refining, nuclear, gas and electric service utilities, wind, solar and bio-fuels.

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