I am Pat Townsend, a medical and environmental anthropologist. I will be submitting additional written comments, bringing my background as a scientist to the challenges of West Valley. Tonight I am speaking not as a scientist but as a member of the Western New York Interfaith Climate Justice Community. ICJC is affiliated with the Network of Religious Communities.

Since 2009, I have supported full exhumation and removal of nuclear material from the site, having come to my position through education efforts of my Presbyterian church. Both the Presbytery of Western New York and the Network of Religious Communities supported the full cleanup option in 2009. Already this year both the Presbytery (in January) and ICJC (in February) have passed strong resolutions in support of full cleanup, this time including their added concerns about the increased severity and frequency of heavy rains. These storms are influenced by global processes of climate change that make erosion into this watershed a greater danger than we knew in 2009, yet this is inadequately addressed in project studies and documents.

When we talk about the nuclear wastes at West Valley, our conversations are mostly about science, economics, and politics. This is as it should be, since we draw on these disciplines to help us formulate alternatives and understand the probable consequences of action or inaction.

However, when we make decisions, these are ethical decisions and must be shaped by our deeply held values. As I have hinted, my values are shaped by my identity as a Christian. In recent years, I have been involved in interfaith conversations, with Seneca and Catholics, Muslims and Jews, particularly talking about pollution and climate disruption. I have learned that the values that underlie my decision making on West Valley are indeed widely shared values.

What are some of the widely shared ethical concerns that we bring to West Valley?

One of the most widely shared is the stewardship of Creation, a respect for the whole created world that includes plants and animals, water, wind, and soil, as well as creatures of our own species. The health of all would be harmed by a worst-case erosion failure, a scenario inadequately explored in the studies so far.

Another shared ethical principle is environmental justice. The burden of environmental pollution should not be unequally imposed on the poor and racial-ethnic minorities, those who benefit least from the industries that created the pollution.

A final one: the principle of intergenerational equity. Our generation created these wastes; our generation must clean them up. Cleanup has proceeded more slowly than envisioned in the FEIS; we need a process of accountability to ensure that activities remain on track. We have already waited too long to finish this task in the lifetime of most of us who were around when Nuclear Fuel Services operated at West Valley; we must not leave it for our grandchildren.