

Misguided Political Posturing Will Lead to Bad Public Policy

The United States Chamber of Commerce called the Democratic Party's platform opposition to Yucca Mountain and its refusal to suggest specific energy alternatives a serious failure to address an urgent national need.

"The Democratic Party's preference to keep radioactive materials scattered throughout the country at nuclear power plants is alarming," said William Kovacs, Chamber vice president of environment, technology and regulatory affairs. "Without a safe, central site we're effectively making ourselves sitting ducks for terrorists."

Democratic Party delegates in Boston approved a national platform that opposes storage of the nation's nuclear waste at Nevada's Yucca Mountain site while stating that the party is committed to achieving energy independence. "Without a permanent storage facility for nuclear waste from electric utilities, nuclear energy—and the 20 percent of our electricity supply it represents—is at risk. Such a policy impairs rather than advances our energy independence," said Kovacs. . . .—*from a U.S. Chamber of Commerce press release, July 29, 2004*

A Major Show of Political Will Is Needed

. . . . Last week, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit . . . hand[ed] down a unanimous decision dismissing most of the objections that figured in multiple lawsuits against Yucca Mountain, save one—but it's a big one. The court concluded that the Environmental Protection Agency acted wrongly when its regulations governing construction of the site demanded only that it guarantee its safety for 10 000 years. In fact, the National Academy of Sciences—whose views Congress has said the EPA must comply with in these matters—has declared that geological concerns should be considered for a much longer period, even up to a million years. If Yucca Mountain is to comply with the law, the entire project must be rethought or redesigned with that in mind. Alternatively, the law has to be changed.

Theoretically, the latter course should be simplest. But this is an election year, and Nevada is a swing state whose voters definitely do not approve of nuclear waste in their back yard and whose legislators constantly work against it. Sen. John F. Kerry (D-Mass.) has stoked the political

fires by denouncing the Yucca Mountain project, which the Bush administration supports. According to the *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, Mr. Kerry's vice presidential choice, Sen. John Edwards (D-N.C.), had promised within hours of his selection to defer to Mr. Kerry on the issue, despite having voted in favor of the nuclear waste repository in 2002. Chances seem slim that Congress will hold hearings on the design of the storage site, or that it will pass legislation designed to sort some of this out—the course of action the courts suggested.

Yet without a major show of political will, the project will never be built. We support the Yucca Mountain project on the grounds that the center of a desert mountain is a better place for the nation's nuclear waste than the several dozen current repositories, many of which are near cities and some of which already are unsafe. But no project of this scale can succeed if Congress is unable to maintain consistent support. Underfunding the research and the construction is one way to ensure an environmental disaster either in Nevada or in one of the waste dumps that won't be cleaned up if Yucca Mountain isn't built. If politics prevents this project from attracting funding and proper attention, then Congress must propose another solution for the nation's nuclear waste.—*from an editorial in the Washington Post, July 11, 2004*

Full Funding for Yucca Mountain

. . . . The Associated Press reports that a House budget subcommittee has approved \$131 million for the [Yucca Mountain] program next fiscal year, or \$749 million less than the Department of Energy requested. The administration's funding request for the project is linked to congressional restrictions on the nuclear waste trust fund, provided by utility payments. Congress has diverted \$15 billion from the fund, mainly for deficit reduction, according to the AP.

The opposition of Nevada to the project is understandable from a parochial point of view. But the necessity of eliminating scattered interim waste storage around the nation is an overarching national concern. Congress recognized that when it promised to provide a secure, central site for waste storage. Providing the funds for its creation is a prerequisite for completing the preparations for Yucca Mountain, and eliminating further delays.—*from an editorial in the Charleston [S.C.] Post and Courier, June 18, 2004* ■