

Time To Move Ahead on Yucca Mountain

Debate on the need for the Yucca Mountain nuclear waste repository recently resumed. South Carolina has a stake in this because we have seven nuclear power reactors and immobilized high-level waste at the Savannah River Site.

But the issue is far bigger than that. The nation and the world need nuclear power because nuclear is safer, cleaner and cheaper than any alternative way of making large amounts of electricity. The Yucca Mountain repository is needed, and it is needed now because utilities are running out of storage space for their spent nuclear fuel. The federal government has the responsibility to solve this, and Yucca Mountain is the agreed solution.

Today, about 20 percent of the nation's and the world's electricity comes from nuclear plants. In South Carolina it

is 56 percent, which leads the nation. For several decades, all U.S. presidents and Congress have agreed that nuclear power should be a part of our energy mix. So the question becomes, what should be do with the spent fuel. . . .

Opponents of Yucca Mountain recently won a partial victory in a court case that ruled that the plan to protect the public for 10 000 years from even minuscule amounts of contaminated groundwater was not long enough. The nuclear utilities may appeal that ruling. If that appeal fails, DOE will either change design to meet a longer requirements or get a new law authoring the 10 000 years.

Unfortunately, fear-mongering by anti-nuclear groups has convinced many Nevada citizens of dangers from transporting the spent fuel to the state, contaminated groundwater and terrorists blowing up shipment casks spreading "lethal" radioactivity. Studies by many experts have not found such dangers.

Have all the risks (dangers) been identified and ad-

What others are saying ▼

dressed? Potential risks have been exhaustively studied by expert scientists and engineers since 1978. No piece of land on Earth has been more thoroughly studied. The bottom line is Yucca Mountain repository will be ultra-safe. A massive body of more than a million documents supports that conclusion. . . . —*from a guest column by Susan Wood, chair of Citizens for Nuclear Technology Awareness, at The State.com, September 17, 2004.*

Nuclear Waste Dilemma

One of the most difficult questions that the federal government will face over the next few years, regardless of which political party is in power, is what to do with the growing piles of radioactive waste being generated from Canada's nuclear reactors.

There are three possible solutions: burying it deep into the rocky Canadian Shield; storing it in an accessible "mausoleum" at one location; or continue storing it in "temporary mausoleums" at existing nuclear power stations, such as at Pickering.

Also to be decided, if Ottawa opts to put the used nuclear fuel in one location, is where that spot would be. Currently, nearly 90 percent of the existing fuel is stored in temporary facilities in Ontario, at sites like the Pickering nuclear power station.

These questions have just become more difficult with the release of a report that says Canadians don't want to dump the nuclear waste down a deep hole—and that they don't trust anyone with the job of handling any waste material.

The report, based on consultations with 450 citizens, is part of the public outreach by the Nuclear Waste Management Organization, an agency created by Ottawa, yet funded by the nuclear industry, on how to dispose of 3.6 million bundles of used nuclear fuel. The waste fuel stays radioactive for centuries.

The agency must recommend to the federal cabinet by November 2005 a preferred disposal method and where it should be located.

Over the next year, Ottawa has much work to do before it can come to grips with these issues. . . . —*from an editorial in the Toronto Star, August 27, 2004.*

Yucca Project To Fail Regardless of Politics

It is unfortunate that the debate in Nevada over Yucca Mountain has drifted into election-year politics. Because,

if you haven't noticed, Nevada has recently won several crucial legal battles, and, as a result, the project will soon collapse under its own ill-conceived weight. It will do so irrespective of politics.

Allow me to summarize some of our successes. In July a federal appeals court rules that the federal government had "unabashedly rejected" sound science in setting the radiation standards for the repository. It overturned the Environmental Protection Agency's rule for the repository, and it overturned the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's licensing rules for the project.

Last week the full D.C. Court of Appeals denied the nuclear industry's petition for rehearing, voting 7–0. The mandate of the court will shortly take effect, with the result that the Yucca project will have no regulatory infrastructure. The rejected regulations took a decade to develop.

That's not all Nevada won at the court of appeals. The court denied the federal government's claim that all environmental issues surrounding the project were moot, and invited Nevada to file as many environmental challenges as it wants. Last week I filed the first such lawsuit, contesting the transportation decisions made by the Energy Department, including its decision to construct in Nevada the longest new rail line in American in 80 years. It is important to note that many of the proposed waste shipments would go through Las Vegas.

In Congress this summer, the efforts of Nevada's delegation apparently helped solidify an 85 percent slashing of the Yucca budget for the new fiscal year—the critical year when the government was supposed to file an application for a construction permit.

In federal court in Las Vegas this year, Nevada successfully preserved the state's claims against the federal government for the massive amounts of water Yucca will use. Without water, the project cannot even be constructed. . . .

Notwithstanding Nevada's victories and the federal government's failures, the Energy Department insists it will file a construction application for Yucca by the end of the year. If and when that application is ever docketed, Nevada will be ready to counter it with a full-court press in a three-year proceeding in Las Vegas. The state's technical experts and attorneys are preparing up to 200 scientific challenges. Of these, there are dozens which, taken alone, would kill the project if granted by NRC's judges. . . .

The final battle over Yucca, at the NRC, will prove that a safe repository cannot be built in the porous volcanic rock that constitutes Yucca Mountain. If the project has not collapsed by then, this final battle will expose it for being the ill-considered project that it is.—*from a guest editorial by Brian Sandoval, attorney general of Nevada, in the Las Vegas Sun, September 11–12, 2004.* ■