

## Candidates Display Ignorance about Yucca Mountain

Let me say at the outset that I hold no brief for the Yucca Mountain repository one way or the other, because I have not seen the license application and, further, I am a registered Democrat and have voted for the Democratic candidate for president in every election since I first voted in 1956. Also, this letter expresses only my own opinion, not any opinion of my employer or of any organization of which I am a member.

The statements made by the presidential candidates about Yucca Mountain and about transportation of spent fuel to the repository, with the exception of Senator McCain's statement, display appalling ignorance [see "Headlines," *Radwaste Solutions*, Sept./Oct. 2007, p. 10]. Senator McCain is the only candidate whose statement displays some understanding of Yucca Mountain. I find a blanket accusation of "bad science" offensive, and I cannot imagine what it is based on. Could any of these ladies and gentleman provide a specific detailed instance of "bad science?" I doubt it—they are just repeating press release propaganda. There are certainly some inadequate and inadequately documented investigations in the Yucca Mountain project, as there would be in any project of this size that has undergone this sort of budget fluctuation, but there is also excellent science, well done and well documented. Many of my colleagues work on the Yucca Mountain project and can hardly be accused of doing bad science. I am offended on their behalf.

Statements about the putative dangers of transporting spent nuclear fuel show both ignorance and bias. The regulations governing radioactive materials transportation and packaging, with which congressional staff ought to be familiar, are more stringent than any other hazardous materials transportation regulations. Moreover, although of course such casks are in transportation accidents, there has never been a transportation accident involving a spent fuel cask in which radioactive material was released from the cask. We have been transporting radioactive materials, including spent fuel, around the United States and overseas for more than 30 years. If these candidates thought the regulations were inadequate or inadequately enforced, they could certainly have spoken up, and even petitioned for better regulation and enforcement.

Couldn't at least one of these candidates be honest and

say that he or she really doesn't know much about Yucca Mountain or spent fuel transportation, especially when that is so obvious? The 1982 Nuclear Waste Policy Act had wide bipartisan support. If those presidential candidates who are now, or have been, members of Congress, disapproved of it, why didn't they move to repeal it? The 1987 Amendments Act, which also had bipartisan support, is to my mind truly counterproductive legislation, but there has certainly been time to amend that as well. The candidates act as if Yucca Mountain and spent fuel transportation were something forced on them and on their constituents by some nefarious outside agency. In

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fact, Congress itself authorized and has continued to release funds for this activity. Why, senators and former senators, representatives and former representatives, didn't you introduce legislation to kill the project if you thought it was so awful?

The greatest disservice done by these candidates is to reinforce the partisan political nature of an essentially scientific and technical issue. This is a mistake just as it is for stem cell research or any other scientific endeavor. If rational decisions are to be made about Yucca Mountain, they cannot be made in the supercharged partisan political atmosphere of a campaign for president of the United States.

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