

Politics: Global and Backyard

We all know that Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) is opposed to the Yucca Mountain high-level waste repository project. And yet he considers himself pronuclear. But I think what he really is could be termed “globally” pronuclear. On a global scale, he supports an energy source that can provide baseload-scale power without any accompanying greenhouse gas emissions. Smart move. More and more people, politicians and regular ordinary Joes and Janes, are globally pronuclear.

But then we get to the old saw, “All politics is local.” And it is at the local, the backyard, level that global views can become skewed. At the backyard level, Harry Reid says he opposes the Yucca Mountain project (1) because he finds it unfair that Nevada must dispose of other states’ nuclear waste, and (2) because he thinks such a repository might negatively affect the Las Vegas tourist traffic, and (3) because he thinks Yucca Mountain is a dangerous place to put nuclear waste. So, pronuclear at the global level, but opposed to a project in his backyard. But it’s not just nuclear energy that suffers.

Consider the controversy over wind turbines near Cape Cod. I am sure the majority of Cape Cod residents consider themselves supportive of “green” energy technologies, and environmentalists cite “wind

and “solar” as the greenest of energy technologies. But when a project to put wind turbines along the Cape Cod shoreline was put forward, suddenly backyard politics came to bear. It turns out you live on Cape Cod for the wonderful sea views, not for views of wind turbines. And suddenly green energy isn’t as important as the view out your picture window. So, did local politicians step up and proclaim, “We must look beyond our own picture windows for the good of the nation.”? Well, hardly. Rather, “I’m supportive of wind energy, but . . .” statements began to appear.

So it’s not just nuclear. But nuclear seems to get more than its share of the “but” statements. Case in point: The “Headlines” section in this issue (see page 6) begins with a story about Private Fuel Storage, the private away-from-reactor spent fuel storage venture planned for the Utah desert. Utah politicians, almost all of whom are Republicans, traditionally nuclear-supporters, began issuing “but” statements as soon as the project was announced. Even a spent fuel *storage* facility with a 40-year license (in other words, nothing *permanent*) was too much for the Utah politicians. So, allegedly working with the Bush administration, they found a way to kill the project, but in a way that a federal court found “arbitrary, capri-



*Beware
of the “I’m
pronuclear,
but...”
Statements*

cious, an abuse of discretion, not in accordance with law...” and so on. I heard Utah Sen. Orrin Hatch (R) speak at an industry conference not too long ago. Almost his first statement was “I’m pronuclear, but . . .” as he began railing against the PFS project.

When all politics is local, it’s going to be hard to find a politician farsighted enough or brave enough to look beyond the backyard to the national benefits of a project or program. But until that happens, it’s not just nuclear projects that are going to suffer.—Nancy J. Zacha, Editor ■

Correction

Those Pesky P-Word Prefixes

A sharp-eyed reader noticed that in the article, “WIPP: 2010 and Beyond,” in the July/August 2010 issue of *Radwaste Solutions* magazine, it was mentioned on page 50 that “The total amount of curies of remote-handled TRU waste that may be disposed of in the WIPP facility is 190 picobecquerels (5.1 million Ci).” Surely, he said, we meant “190 *petabecquerels*.” Yes, we did, and *Radwaste Solutions* apologizes for the error. Our thanks to Kevin McCoy at Areva for pointing out the mistake.