

Nevada Appeal
Sunday, December 28, 2008

COMMENTARY

New Energy Secretary will kill Yucca dump

Guy W. Farmer

It appears that President-elect Obama will keep his promise to Nevada to kill the proposed Yucca Mountain nuclear waste dump because his Energy Secretary nominee, Dr. Steven Chu, is firmly opposed to the storage of at least 77,000 tons of highly toxic nuclear waste in the Silver State.

We well remember how President Bush betrayed Nevada early in his presidency by approving the Yucca Mountain site despite electoral promises to base his decision on “sound science.” By contrast, Energy Secretary in-waiting Chu, a Nobel Prize-winning physicist who directs the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, recognizes that Yucca Mountain falls short of federal safety standards and that it’s dangerous to store all of the nation’s nuclear waste at one site.

In a 2005 interview, Chu said that the Southern Nevada site would be filled up with waste from all existing civilian and military nuclear waste as soon as it opens its doors. “So we need three or four Yucca Mountains,” he said on a UC-Berkeley Web site. “The other thing is that storing the fuel at Yucca Mountain is supposed to be safe for 10,000 years... (but) the metal casings will probably fail on a scale of 5,000 years.” So much for safety and “sound science.” Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., praised Chu as “an extremely accomplished scientist and strong choice to lead America into a more energy-independent future” and added that “Dr. Chu also knows, like most Nevadans, that Yucca Mountain is not a viable solution for dumping and dealing with nuclear waste.”

Congresswoman Shelley Berkley, D-Las Vegas, echoed Reid when she said, “Nevada leaders look forward to working with a president who is on our side when it comes to stopping Yucca Mountain.

No longer will we have a policy that ignores science and safety...”

It's about time that the federal government paid attention to the wishes of the people of the state of Nevada, which have been mostly ignored by both parties ever since Congress passed the infamous "Screw Nevada" bill in 1987. The politicians chose Nevada as the nation's nuclear dumping ground at that time because they viewed our state as a vast desert wasteland with few voters and little political clout in Washington, D.C. Well, that was then and this is now, and Yucca Mountain will soon be history despite intense lobbying efforts by the nuclear energy industry and its well-paid apologists.

But the Bush administration won't give up on the Yucca project until the president leaves office on Jan. 20. Just last month outgoing Energy Secretary Samuel Bodman issued a report concluding, according to the Associated Press, that "there are no technology constraints to a major expansion of the proposed nuclear waste site in Nevada." In fact, Bodman and his cronies want to triple the amount of waste to be stored at Yucca Mountain.

Obviously, that proposal is dead on arrival.

This is just another example of an arrogant federal government usurping states' rights even though the 10th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution guarantees that "powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution ... are reserved to the States..." So how did the Feds assert the power to dump nuclear waste on Nevada?

Nevertheless, Yucca Mountain proponents continue to wave alleged fistfuls of federal dollars under our noses in hopes that we'll take the money and ignore the very real dangers of a huge nuclear waste dump in our state. That reminds me of when President Clinton's friend James Carville talked about dragging hundred-dollar bills through trailer parks during the Paula Jones sex scandal. Let's just say no to these toxic, and insulting, proposals.
Happy New Year!

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This article was posted at: <http://www.state.nv.us/nucwaste/news2008/nm12245.htm>

