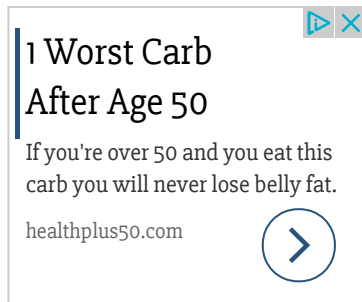


EDITORIAL:

Now is not the time to get sleepy on Yucca waste dump

Monday, Dec. 19, 2016 | 2 a.m.

The proposed Yucca Mountain Nuclear Waste Repository is dead and buried, a desolate monument to bad ideas and wasted money.



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At least, that's how Harry Reid described it in his farewell speech to the Senate.

"It's gone," he said. "Someone asked me the other day, you know, the Republicans are in power now; they're going to come back to Yucca Mountain. I said, 'Well, they better bring a checkbook with them.' Because there's nothing there now. They'd have to start all over again. They spent more than \$1 billion digging that tunnel. That's ground up for scrap metal. There's nothing there. You could probably get it going again now for \$10 billion to \$12 billion. So if you have a way to pay for it, good luck."

It would be nice to think Reid is right — that he could ride into retirement with a legacy as the leader who stood tall for Nevada and sent the diabolical project to its grave.

It also would be naive.

The wolves are still out there, and ominous reports suggest that they may be circling again now that Reid is out of the way (or at least out of his official position).

One sign came in November, when Bloomberg quoted unidentified sources saying President-elect Donald Trump's advisers were discussing reviving the project. Then came a report this month in a trade publication saying Trump was "beefing up his transition effort with advocates for federal review" of Yucca Mountain with an eye toward possibly resurrecting it. Last week, U.S. Rep. Joe Wilson, R-S.C., told his constituents that the transition team had distributed a survey to the Energy Department on the matter.

So despite Reid's assurances, this is no time to get sleepy on the issue.

Nevada's congressional delegates should fight against the project with every bit as much fury as Reid did.

Meanwhile, Las Vegas leaders and top state officials should back them in a unified front.

If anything, this is a time to be more wary. Reid's departure leaves Nevada vulnerable, because the new congressional delegation will no longer have the political muscle it boasted the past decade or so.

On the plus side, Reid will be succeeded by Catherine Cortez Masto, a Yucca opponent. And one of his protégés, Ruben Kihuen, defeated Crescent Hardy in the House, which is critical given that Kihuen shares Reid's views on the project while Hardy said Nevada should be open to discussion about it.

Hardy was dead wrong.

There can be no concessions. As Reid is rightfully lauded for recognizing, Yucca cannot be allowed to move so much as one inch forward. The risks of transporting nuclear waste through the heart of Las Vegas — home to 2 million-plus residents — are too high. And the dangers of storing the material 90 miles away in a place where it could leak into groundwater are too real.


Whether Trump is fully aware of the potentially disastrous effects of a Yucca Mountain waste dump on Southern Nevada, including on his own hotel property off the Strip, is anybody's guess. In a TV interview during the campaign, he said he was familiar with concerns among resort operators but refused to say whether he supported the project. He would say only that he would give it a serious examination after taking office.

That study should include in-depth conversations with Las Vegas business leaders. We're confident they'll tell him to leave the project in the trash, where it belongs.

We also expect Trump's pick for Energy secretary, Rick Perry, to stick to the position he took on the subject during a 2011 presidential debate, when he expressed opposition to Yucca and said states — not the feds — should decide whether they wanted to store waste within their borders.

There's one acceptable outcome on Yucca Mountain: It needs to be relegated to memory, where it can serve as a harmless but enduring reminder of Reid's importance to Southern Nevada.

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