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YOUR TURN

Nevada in a good position to stop Yucca project

Secretary of Energy Steven Chu said this month that the proposed Yucca Mountain site is no option for storing highly radioactive nuclear waste.

For the first time in the 20-year battle against the proposed Yucca Mountain waste repository, Nevada has taken a favorable position to stop the project once and for all.

Nevada has a friend in the White House. President Barack Obama has proposed a drastic budget program and has expressed his commitment to finding better alternatives for addressing the problem.

The federal government finally is being realistic and respectful of the scientific findings concerning the Yucca Mountain site. While I am optimistic that we will see the demise of the project, we cannot give up our efforts until a comprehensive, binding decision is reached.

In the meantime, the administrative proceedings continue to move forward.

The Department of Energy has filed a license application with the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

The state has responded with its own serious legal contentions. My office is committed to meeting the state's current obligations in the NRC licensing process and in pending litigation before the federal courts.

Yet there are a few individuals who suggest Nevada should drop its case against DOE in exchange for monetary benefits.

Despite what these Yucca proponents say, there is no money available for so-called benefits.

The proponents cite provisions in federal law that supposedly offer money to Nevada in exchange for reversing its 20-year position. These provisions have long since expired.

At a time when the federal government has finally questioned the viability of the project and is exploring better alternatives, why would Nevada reverse its 20-year position and pursue a strategy that costs money that is no longer available or explore a reprocessing option in Nevada that is scientifically and practically unsound by any reasonable account?

While I agree that there must be a national dialogue on the environmentally and scientifically sound method for the safe disposal of nuclear waste and that Nevada should play a role in that dialogue, a reprocessing option in its current form would not work for our state.

Nevada is the driest state in the nation and is not the place to site a water-intensive nuclear recycling facility, thousands of miles from nuclear-waste-generating power plants. Does it really make sense to place a nuclear reactor reprocessing facility that generates millions of gallons of liquid radioactive waste in the major earthquake zone underlying Yucca Mountain? Or, for that matter, to transport nuclear waste to the remote Nevada desert for recycling and then transport it again to where it is used?

Until a final decision is reached terminating the Yucca Mountain project, we should not let ourselves be distracted from our responsibility to our state and future generations of Nevadans. We should not be distracted by false hopes of minimal monetary benefits that are no longer viable under federal law.

My office will hold DOE to the requirements of the law. Now, more than ever, Nevada is poised to defeat the Yucca Mountain beast once and for all. Until that time, we must continue to rise to the challenge.

- Catherine Cortez Masto is Nevada's attorney general.



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