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The Yucca Mountain Repository is a Need Whose Time Has Come

Nuclear energy is a clean, safe, renewable source of electric. (NEI) As fossil fuel supplies continue to diminish, alternative forms of energy need to be established. Solar energy and wind energy are good alternatives but both depend on unreliable sources. Nuclear energy is a consistent, reliable and with the implementation of recycling, an infinite source of energy. Despite opposite, the Yucca Mountain Project is forging onward. With this project comes the issue of transport and long term storage of spent plutonium fuel cells. Through proper handling, training and specialized designed vessels, these tasks can be completed safety and with environmental efficiency. The global community view nuclear energy as the wave of the future. European and Asian countries are expanding their nuclear facilities and technologies while incorporating recycling of spent fuel cells. President Bush has approved the repository and the project is moving forward. Nuclear is a viable option for the future and one we must consider therefore the United States needs a centralized nuclear disposal site until U.S. nuclear recycling technology is adapted. That site is Yucca Mountain, Nevada.

The nuclear energy plants of the 1970s are being dismantled. With this come spent energy cells. Special handling has to occur to prevent contamination of the environment. A disposal site has to be determined so that the waste can be collected and properly dealt with in the most efficient manner. After two decades of studies; President Bush, Congress, environmental groups and scientists have chosen Yucca Mountain as the most likely place to bury our nuclear waste. (Yucca Mountain Project)

The Department of Energy, the Department of Transportation and the Nuclear Regulatory commission have established regulations for the safe transport of radioactive waste. The transport of radioactive materials and nuclear waste has been on going for over twenty years. During that time only four, non fatal, incidents occurred. (Cohen) Transport of nuclear waste is necessary. It has been and will continue to be conducted safely.

There are many objectors to the Yucca Mountain project. The normal "NIMBY" objections were heard as well as those of fear, land claims, environmental concern and Nevada Congressional parties seeking greater compensation. Objectors to this project claim that a central repository should not be established due to transport issues and the fear of terrorism. Unjustified fears have caused the nation to view nuclear energy as a hazard and therefore nuclear energy should not be considered as a source of on going electrical generation. However, nuclear energy can help save our environment due to lack of byproducts and clean air techniques. With proper handling and training, nuclear energy is a safe, efficient and an ongoing source of electricity. It is cleaner and safer than fossil fuel methods of energy generation.

Residents of NV fear for their safety due to the possible distribution of nuclear radiation through ground water into their drinking and irrigation waters thereby contaminating their crops and farm animals. Environmentalists fear for radioactive fall out and contamination of crops, land and water from nuclear waste spillage. Local residents of Elko, Reno, Las Vegas and through out the area are concerned about leakage from nuclear waste casks buried in Yucca Mountain. They fear that the ground water will carry the radiation into their drinking water source thereby contaminating food, crops and livestock. Radiation sickness is a valid concern. Radionuclides are introduced into

the food chain naturally from mineral deposits beneath the surface or from atmospheric ultraviolet and cosmic rays. (Moore, p.315) However, human induced radionuclides are generally tens to hundreds of time higher than those found in nature. Exposure to high level radiation has potential irreversible damaging effects to the human body. The general population fears that nuclear waste leakage will create this situation.

Yucca Mountain is situated at the border of government and Indian lands. The local Indian tribe claims that Yucca Mountain is "Indian land" and the government is once again steeling from the "Redman" thereby breaking more treaty agreements. Who has the actual rights to the mountain is of question. Claiming Yucca Mountain for this nuclear project may be another act of encroachment by the US Government. In 1863 a treaty was established that named a 93,750-square-mile swath across parts of Nevada, California, Utah and Idaho as Ruby Valley. Ruby Valley was declared as the lands of the Western Shoshones Nation. (D'Errico) The Western Shoshones Indian Tribe is suing the United States for broken treaties and land theft. This tribe claims that Yucca Mountain is sacred land. From personal experience, I would not be surprised if the government did not decide to just take what they wanted. An offer for payment was extended to the tribe from the federal government but the amount offered was an insult.

Keith Rogers of the Las Vegas Review-Journal reported on March 5, 2005 in his article, "Western Shoshones file Yucca Lawsuit" that the "repository sits on land covered by the treaty, an eight-part pact with the Western Shoshones that was negotiated by James Nye, who was then governor of the Nevada Territory. The plaintiffs from the Timbisha and Te-Moak bands -- Joe Kennedy, John Wells, Pauline Esteves and Kevin Gillette -- and the Western National Council claim the treaty allows only five uses for the land:

settlements, mines, ranches, roads and a railroad." The tribe is thought to be the best bet for stopping the Yucca Mountain project.

Rogers did his research and reported further, "In 1946, an American Indian claims commission determined that when the West was settled, the Western Shoshones lost their land through gradual encroachment. In 1985, the Supreme Court favored the federal government in a lawsuit over who had title to the land. Last year [2004], President Bush approved a congressional measure to pay Western Shoshones more than $145 million in compensation and interest for their territory. The payment was for $27 million. The claims commission, awarded in 1979, was based on territorial value in 1872. According to Yowell, no money has yet been doled out to Western Shoshones who are split on whether or not to accept it." (Rogers) As with most Indian vs. government, stall techniques are employed to avoid an actual decision making.

Lack of understanding and media hype has caused the confusion and panic. When the term nuclear is stated; everyone thinks of Japan during WWII. This is not the technology we are speaking of in nuclear energy. The public needs proper education on this project in order to help it gain acceptance. Nuclear energy grade plutonium and weapons grade are two different things. Energy grade is much less toxic and should not be feared. Yucca Mountain is a highly guarded government facility.

Globally, nuclear energy is alive and well. It is in use by many nations such as Europe and Asia. Rene de Preneuf, VP of International Development, Asia, explains how France receives 80% of its energy from nuclear power while Germany, Switzerland, Belgium and Japan obtain more than 30% of theirs from clean, safe nuclear generation. (De Preneuf) They have learned how to harness the power of plutonium, recycle its

attributes and provide their citizens with an inexhaustible source of clean, recyclable energy. Nuclear energy is an economically feasible solution.

People need a chance to view the casks and understand how the burial process works. (Tour Yucca Mountain) They need education not intimidation about nuclear energy. Fossil fuels will run out. Nuclear energy is a clean and viable option that will live on. With recycling, nuclear energy will provide a non-exhaustible source of energy for future generations.

We are all seeking a better tomorrow for our children and grandchildren. Leaving them without this technology would set them back into the Middle Ages once fossil sources were exhausted. Is this what we want for our children? We need to establish a nuclear energy policy in the US, like is taking place globally, where we can sustain a cleaner and brighter future for our grandchildren's grandchildren. Establishing a nuclear repository and eventually a recycling system will allow us to provide for the future. Nuclear energy is not to be feared but understood. Through proper education; that can occur. How do you wish to provide for your grandchildren's' tomorrows?

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