



UNITED STATES
NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20555

March 21, 1990

The Honorable Pete Wilson
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Wilson:

I am responding to your letter of February 23, 1990, about Mr. Chad Thomas' suggestion for disposal of nuclear waste in outer space, as an alternative to the present plan for geologic disposal at Yucca Mountain, Nevada.

As you know, Congress, in 1982, passed the Nuclear Waste Policy Act (NWSA), which specified that disposal of high-level nuclear waste and spent nuclear fuel will be accomplished in a geologic repository. The Act assigned the Department of Energy (DOE) responsibility to evaluate proposed sites, and to design, construct and operate an appropriate facility. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) was charged with developing standards governing radioactive release from the site, and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) was given responsibility for licensing the facility, if it could be shown that it meets safety and environmental standards. Subsequently, in the Nuclear Waste Policy Amendments Act of 1987, Congress determined that initial consideration of a site for the geologic disposal of high-level waste would be limited to Yucca Mountain, Nevada.

Even before passage of the NWSA, DOE had been designated as the lead agency for the management and disposal of radioactive wastes. In carrying out that responsibility, DOE, in 1980, published a statement of position, "In the Matter of NRC's Proposed Rulemaking on the Storage and Disposal of Nuclear Waste" (DOE/NE-0007). This report discussed a number of alternative methods for disposal of high-level waste, including disposal in outer space, as suggested by Mr. Thomas. DOE concluded that the possibility of launch failure or failure to achieve proper trajectory by the transport vehicle was sufficiently high to make unacceptable the risk that waste could be accidentally released in the environment. The report stated that "vehicle loss probabilities have been estimated to be as high as 0.06/launch" (six percent). DOE further noted that the (British) Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution had concluded that "...the consequences of even one failure that resulted in the release of the wastes into the atmosphere would be so serious as to make the method (space disposal) quite unacceptable at present." We think that those conclusions remain valid today.

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The Honorable Pete Wilson

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We believe that the approach specified in the NWPA will assure that all safety concerns related to the development of a high-level waste repository will be adequately evaluated during the NRC licensing review process.

I trust that this responds to your constituent's suggestion.

Sincerely,



James M. Taylor
Executive Director
for Operations

PETE WILSON
CALIFORNIA

COMMITTEES
ARMED SERVICES
AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION AND FORESTRY
COMMERCE, SCIENCE AND TRANSPORT
SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT
JOINT ECONOMIC COMMITTEE

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20510

February 23, 1990

Congressional Affairs Director
Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Washington, D.C. 20555

Dear Sir:

I have enclosed a copy of a letter which I received from Irwin Ottenberg of Soquel, California + Chad Thomas regarding a new set of regulations for the disposal of nuclear waste. I would appreciate it very much if you would bring this letter to the attention of the appropriate individuals within your agency for consideration and respond to me at your earliest convenience.

Please return with your reply the correspondence which I have enclosed referring to case 0054030011.

Thank you very much for your assistance in this matter.

Sincerely,



PETE WILSON

PW:pd
Enclosure

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DEAR SENATOR WILSON,

12/5/89

My name is Chad Thomas and I am writing to you regarding the issue on the Nuclear Dump Plan.

The Bush Administration has planned an opening for a long-term dump for highly radioactive nuclear waste that has been planned for Yucca Mountain in Nevada. By having this dump there are so many health hazards. If by some chance there is a leak it can kill off all the trees and get into the air and cause harm to people.

My idea on this important issue is that somehow we can devise a plan where we can take the nuclear waste and dump it out in space. By doing this it will not cause harm to anyone or anything. I would really like to know how you stand on this issue please. I have enclosed my mailing address. Thank you for your patience.

CHAD THOMAS
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VAN NUYS CALIFORNIA 91406