

CNN - Crossfire

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**Yucca Mountain Nuclear Storage Facility**

**BROADCAST EXCERPT**

**ANNOUNCER:** Crossfire. On the left: James Carville and Paul Begala; on the right: Robert Novak and Tucker Carlson. In the crossfire: going nuclear and heading west. How do you feel about deadly nuclear waste passing through your town?

**JAMES CARVILLE:** We're back, and we're going nuclear. Activist Nevada Governor Kenny Guinn who's up in non-nuclear arms over a White House plan to build an atomic dump in his state. The Yucca Mountain facility would be the final resting place of all the nation's nuclear waste. "Not in my backyard," says Guinn. He exercised his right and vetoed the plan. Now Congress gets the final say, and Guinn and his congressional delegation are the first to admit they face an uphill battle.

Let's welcome to our guests, both Republicans, Nevada Senator John Ensign, and former White House Chief of Staff, nuclear energy lobbyist, and Crossfire host, John Sununu.

(Applause.)

**MR. :** Hi, James, nice to see you.

Welcome back to Crossfire.

**ROBERT NOVAK:** Senator Ensign, this may be the end of your political career, being on –

**SEN. JOHN ENSIGN:** Oh, you're jumping right in, huh?

**MR. NOVAK:** -- the Carville side. (Cross talk, laughter.)

Senator Ensign, the Secretary of Energy, Spencer Abraham, who's a pretty good man, has made some sense on this issue this morning. I'd like you to listen to him please.

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SPENCER ABRAHAM: (From tape.) Very close to large population centers and waterways all over the country in temporary facilities. That's not the -- from a security point of view or an environmental point of view, for us to maintain it.

MR. NOVAK: Sir, the waste is sitting in the large population centers, and we have this very safe place in Nevada, and the gambling industry says, no, we can't have it here because it might upset the high rollers when they throw craps and it hurts the gamblers. Isn't that what's going on?

SEN. ENSIGN: No, actually, this is the big lie that's been perpetrated by the government. They're saying that all of this waste is going to go from all of these sites all over the country and end up in Nevada, and all of the waste will end up there. That's not true; it's a big lie.

As a matter of fact, the waste is going to stay at those sites. Some of it is going to come to Nevada, but a lot of it's going to stay at those sites, so all we're doing is we're building another repository, but the waste is still going to be all over the sites. But the worst thing is is now it's going to be transported through those major population centers by schools, by churches, through neighborhoods.

MR. NOVAK: Well, this is your strategy that was worked out by the gambling industry and its lobbyists to try and scare the hell out of the American people, isn't it?

SEN. ENSIGN: What's the gambling industry have to do with this? This has to do with the people --

MR. NOVAK: Well, they're financing your whole campaign, aren't they?

SEN. ENSIGN: No, they're not.

MR. NOVAK: They're not?

SEN. ENSIGN: No, they're not. This has to do with the people in the state of Nevada that -- as a matter of fact, our legislature is the one who appropriated the money for it, our county is coming through. The gaming industry, we went to them and asked them for a little, but it's not even 10 percent of the money.

MR. CARVILLE: Governor, when you ran for governor in New Hampshire, you said you didn't want nuclear waste to be stored in New Hampshire because it would be bad for tourism.

JOHN SUNUNU: No, that's not true. I said I didn't want the site that they had selected which was in the middle of a University campus, on private property, in the middle of 280,000 people, 12 miles from the state capital, in a geological formation that

wasn't what they said. And I said, just go back and take a look at the data we sent you. They looked at the data, and they realized it wasn't the right sight. But I supported, I supported Seabrook, which is temporary storage facilities.

MR. CARVILLE: Why do you want to send nuclear state to his state when he's more tourist dependent than New Hampshire is?

MR. SUNUNU: The issue is not tourism. The issue is whether or not the geology is right, whether the science is right, whether the site is safe, and whether it's an appropriate place to have –

MR. CARVILLE: Governor, what percent of the people in Nevada would depend on the tourist industry for a job?

MR. SUNUNU: The issue isn't tourism –

MR. CARVILLE: Tell the people in Nevada that.

MR. SUNUNU: I'm not going to answer the question of tourism – this country has, over the last 20 years, put into place, under law, a process in which the federal government accepted the responsibility to take this waste.

MR. NOVAK: Senator Ensign, there's a lot of funny stuff going on here, and I think you know exactly what's going on, and we're going to try and find out.

In today's Washington Post, in the very last paragraph, there's a quote by your Republican Governor, Kenny Guinn, and we'll put it up on the screen. He said, "Nevada has never said we don't want it at any cost." Now a lot of people think you are saying, okay – you've got your hand out. If you could give us some federal land, if you could give us a few billion dollars by putting a tax on electric bills, if you could pay off the State of Nevada, we'll take your nuclear waste. Is that what's going on?

SEN. ENSIGN: No, as a matter of fact we've said we don't want it at any cost. You know, people in the State of Nevada – he said just the opposite of that. He said yesterday – I was at the speech – he said yesterday the people of the State of Nevada and our safety is not for sale at any price; it is non-negotiable. We are united as Republicans and Democrats to stop Yucca Mountain. But we're not just against it for Nevadans, we're against it for all Americans cause it's going to be transported through areas, and post-September 11<sup>th</sup> – we have to think about –

(Crosstalk.)

MR. CARVILLE: I want to go up here, and I want to show you both – Senator, you and the governor something here that President Bush said during the campaign.

(Begin video segment.)

ANNOUNCER: Al Gore's negative attacks on George Bush: distortions. The truth? Bush and Gore agree. While scientists study the issue, Bush has pledged to veto any legislation to make Yucca Mountain a temporary nuclear storage facility.

(End video segment.)

MR. SUNUNU: That was --

(Cross talk.)

MR. CARVILLE: Let me read this -- hold on, before you go, let's just calm down here --

MR. SUNUNU: Let's explain what the quote is --

MR. CARVILLE: -- let's calm down before you go -- he says -- I'm going to give you -- that was put on by the Republican party in Nevada. He said, I believe in sound science, not politics -- (unintelligible) -- any high-level nuclear waste deposit. As president, I would not send nuclear waste to any proposed site either permanent or temporary unless it's been deemed scientifically safe. What evidence does he have now that he didn't have in October of 2000?

MR. SUNUNU: That statement that you put up there was a quote that said, I will not use Nevada as a temporary. We're talking about Yucca Mountain as a permanent.

MR. : What?

MR. CARVILLE: He said it was going to be based on science.

MR. : This is a different statement. It's a different statement.

MR. CARVILLE: Governor, answer this question. Answer this question. What science exists today that didn't exist in October?

MR. SUNUNU: Are you going to give me a chance to finish?

MR. CARVILLE: If you answer the question.

MR. SUNUNU: I will. I just want to separate the two pieces. The quote from the president was relative to temporary sites. Now the question is, is there science and technology that says this the right site? There is \$4 billion worth of science and technology that says this is an appropriate site to move into the licensing process. And that's what this is.

(Cross talk.)

MR. NOVAK: Just a minute. You know who said during the campaign that we will rely on safe science. You know who said that?

MR. : That's an Al Gore quote.

MR. NOVAK: That's an Al Gore quote, so this is just a lot of -- (cross talk) -- typical Carvillian --

(Cross talk.)

MR. CARVILLE: Finish. Answer the question. What science is available today that wasn't available in October when he made the claim?

MR. NOVAK: They said the same thing, didn't they, John?

MR. SUNUNU: But it's two different issues. The science is applying -- the science applies to the permanent site. If there are --

MR. NOVAK: Go ahead, Senator.

SEN. ENSIGN: Here's the problem -- is that when he made that statement there were many scientific, technical problems still to be answered. Today, as of December, there were 293 scientific technical problems still to be answered before the licensing process went forward.

MR. SUNUNU: No. To be answered during the licensing process --

SEN. ENSIGN: That is not according to the GAO.

MR. SUNUNU: -- and there is a difference, Senator --

SEN. ENSIGN: That was not according to the GAO.

MR. SUNUNU: -- there is a difference --

MR. NOVAK: Can I make a --

MR. SUNUNU: -- and this is -- wait a minute -- now this is part of the misrepresentation that has been taking place on this issue.

This site is the result of a procedure supported by eight secretaries of energy, four presidents -- Republican and Democrat -- legislation passed in '82 under a

Democratically-controlled Congress, in which a process for winnowing down was put into place. That process has taken place –

SEN. ENSIGN: A political process, not a scientific process.

MR. SUNUNU: Both. Politics and science.

(Cross, talk.)

MR. NOVAK: Senator, let me ask you this, a straight question. You're a good, conservative Republican when you're not carrying the ball for your state's gambling industry, so I admire you, but isn't –

SEN. ENSIGN: You believe in freedom, don't you?

MR. NOVAK: I certainly do.

SEN. ENSIGN: There you go.

MR. NOVAK: I'm sure you know that there has to be in the future, if we're going to have clean energy and we're not going to have total oil reliance, we have to have a nuclear power industry. The tree huggers don't want the nuclear industry. This is the plan for disposing of the nuclear waste. What is your alternative to this plan?

SEN. ENSIGN: I'm glad you asked that: you set us up.

First of all, I believe in nuclear power. I believe it is part of the energy portfolio for the future.

This makes nuclear power less viable because it's too expensive. This is a multi-billion dollar boondoggle. Sixty billion dollars according to government estimates is what it's going to cost to build Yucca Mountain. That's the equivalent of what it takes for all of our aircraft carriers combined. The alternative is this: leave it on site right where it is, dry-cast storage. That's maybe a billion to \$2 billion instead of \$60 billion, and then put some money into research for recycling nuclear waste and that makes nuclear waste more viable – or nuclear power more viable for the future.

MR. NOVAK: Senator, we're out of time.

SEN. ENSIGN: That's the answer.

MR. NOVAK: But you don't have the votes in the Senate.

SEN. ENSIGN: Yes, we do have the votes.

MR. NOVAK: Senator Ensign, thank you very much.

Governor Sununu, welcome back to Crossfire. Thank you very much.

Okay, still ahead tonight, your chance to fire back at us; but first, Carville and I head into the ring for round six.

(End of excerpt.)