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TO: Mr. Robert E. Browning, Director

FROM: Paul T. Prestholt, Sr. On-Site Licensing Representative

DATE: October 23, 1986

SUBJECT: Newspaper Information

Please find enclosed several articles of interest that appeared in our local newspaper.

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Las Vegas Review-Journal/Wednesday, October 15, 1986

Nuke storage dealt setback

Knight-Ridder News Service

WASHINGTON — House and Senate negotiators, dealing a blow to the government's plans for permanent storage of nuclear wastes, have cut the program's budget and prohibited any exploratory drilling next year at sites in Texas, Nevada and Washington, congressional sources said Tuesday.

The agreement, reached over the weekend in marathon sessions of the House-Senate appropriations conference committee, leaves unclear whether the Energy Department would have enough money to buy the agricultural property it is seeking in the Texas Panhandle. The site, near Hereford in Deaf Smith County, is one of three nominated by President Reagan for an initial repository for high-level radioactive wastes.

Ginger King, a spokeswoman for the Energy Department's nuclear waste office, said the department had heard conflicting reports concerning the conference committee's work and would "not jump to conclusions" but would wait until Congress voted on the measure.

The department was eager to begin drilling holes at the sites to study their geologic merits as tombs for highly radioactive wastes that must be kept isolated for the thousands of years it would take for their radioactivity to dissipate.

The conference committee slashed $212 million from the administration's request for the program, settling on $499 million — the 1986 level of funding, said Senate staffers familiar with the negotiations.

In addition, $79 million of the money would be withheld until the Energy Department reported to Congress on progress made toward consultation and cooperation agreements with the three affected states, said the staffers, who asked not to be identified.

The House version of the bill had given the program $677 million and the Senate version $380 million.

The administration had asked initially for $769 million, but it deleted $58 million when Energy Secretary John Herrington announced that the department was suspending indefinitely the search for a second nuclear waste site in six Eastern states and Minnesota.

The move infuriated members of Congress from Western states, who launched efforts in both the House and the Senate to kill funding for work at the first three sites: in Deaf Smith County in the Texas Panhandle; Yucca Mountain in Nevada; and the Hanford Nuclear Reservation in Washington state.

The appropriations for the nuclear waste program are part of a huge, half-trillion-dollar spending bill Congress is struggling to adopt before midnight Thursday. The administration has threatened a veto of the measure over several provisions.

Las Vegas Review-Jrnl
Wed., 10/17/86

State nuke waste director praises accord in Congress

CARSON CITY (UPI) — A state director of the Nuclear Waste Project Office Thursday praised a congressional agreement that will halt for one year exploratory drilling at three potentional sites for a high-level readioactive waste dump.

Director Robert Loux says the one-year moratorium is an indication Congress is fed up with the way the Department of Energy has been conducting the waste program. Loux, a harsh critic of the federal agency, suggested the department use the year to rebuild public confidence.

Loux said he hopes the DOE "pays attention to the mandate from Congress."

A House-Senate conference committtee Wednesday agreed on a $499 million budget for the nuclear waster program. The compromise says no money is to be used for drilling or exploratory shafts during this fiscal year at the three proposed sites in Nevada, Washington and Texas.

It also calls for $79 million to be withheld until the energy department proves to Congress it has made good faith efforts to negotiate cooperative agreements with the three states and Indian tribes. The release of the funds must be approved by energy and water developement committees of the two houses.

The energy department has been sharply criticized by the states and Indian groups for not sharing or cooperating in studies for the location of the repository.

The eneregy department originally sought a $769 budget, but Sen. Paul Laxalt, R-Nev., sliced it to $380 million in the Senate. The House approved a budget of $677 million and the conference committees then hammered out the compromise measure.

DOE mulls effect of funding cuts on nuclear dump study

By David Koenig
Review-Journal Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — Energy Department officials said Thursday they don't know what effect a funding cut will have on their plans to study Yucca Mountain as a possible nuclear waste dump, but vowed to obey Congress' wishes.

As part of a massive spending bill to run the government for one year, House and Senate negotiators agreed to limit funds for the nuclear waste repository program and prohibit construction of big exploratory shafts at Yucca Mountain and sites in Washington state and Texas.

"We don't have an analysis yet," said Ginger King, spokesman for the Energy Department's office of high-level nuclear waste management.

King added that agency officials won't comment until Congress gives final approval to the huge spending bill, which is just a matter of time.

The Energy Department wants to put the nation's first high-level nuclear waste repository at one of the three Western locations. In May, the department almost killed plans for a second waste dump, to be located in the East, inciting outrage among Western lawmakers.

The provision is part of a $576 billion bill to fund the government for the next year. The funding bill was approved late Wednesday night by the House, and could be approved by the Senate today.

Robert Loux, director of Nevada's office of nuclear waste programs and a harsh critic of the federal agency, hailed the one-year delay in work at Yucca Mountain, about 80 miles north of Las Vegas.

"But it remains to be seen if DOE pays attention or returns to business as normal," said Loux, who believes, along with other Nevada officials and lawmakers, that the decision to put off a second dump violated federal law.

Loux said the agreement "is indicative of what we're seeing: Congress is getting fed up with the way DOE is running the program ... and breaking the law.

"We hope the effect of the moratorium is that DOE will take the time to rebuild public confidence in the program, but perhaps it's too late to do that," Loux said.

The deal struck by congressional negotiators will delay the search for a nuclear waste dump by one year and possibly longer, according to congressional sources.

Details of the agreement, forged late Friday, were just beginning to come into focus as Congress considered the government funding bill.

The agreement is a compromise between the House, which did not want to interfere with the Energy Department's handling of the nuclear waste program, and the Senate, which wanted deeper cuts. The House negotiators were led by Rep. Tom Bevill, D-Ala., chairman of the House energy appropriations subcommittee.

Senate conferees were led by Appropriations Committee Chairman Mark Hatfield, R-Ore. Hatfield has been critical of the Energy Department's selection of Hanford, Wash., as a finalist.

Under terms of the deal, the Energy Department, which asked for $769 million, would get $420 million for fiscal 1987. It could qualify for another $79 million if it can demonstrate it is consulting with the three states considered for the waste dump.

However, the money will come with strings attached. The agreement provides that the Energy Deparment cannot use the funds to drill exploratory shafts, which the department must drill in order to collect informations about the rock structure and water movement at each site.

Anson Franklin, the Energy Department's director of communications, said the agency hasn't determined how much work it will be able to do at Yucca Mountain, but that it will follow the dictates of Congress.

"Needless to say, we will obey the law and if that prohibition is in there we will not be drilling the (exploratory) shaft," Franklin said.

Franklin said Energy officials "knew something like this could be coming."

Franklin said he couldn't tell how much the congressional action will set back the nuclear repository program.

The nuclear waste program was one of the major differences between House and Senate versions of the fiscal 1987 spending bill.

'Honest appraisal' of nuke dump in works

By Dan Njegomir
Review-Journal

An independent study of the possible effects of a proposed high-level nuclear waste dump on Southern Nevada is under way, a county official said Tuesday.

Saying the federal government may not be the best source for an impact assessment of a project it is touting, the county's Dennis Bechtel said a three-year study managed by a Phoenix consulting firm will give an "honest appraisal" of the project.

The study was authorized by a planning group of Southern Nevada counties and cities that would be affected by the dump.

The Nevada Test Site's Yucca Mountain, along with sites in the states of Washington and Texas, are the three finalists in the Department of Energy's search for a dump to handle the nation's nuclear waste for years to come.

Federal officials have promised to select a site in 1991 and to begin construction of the waste facility by 1998, but the site-selection process has stirred concerns about direct and indirect effects of the facility.

The multimillion-dollar, federally funded study by Phoenix-based Mountain West will target long-run social and economic effects of the proposed dump on Southern Nevada, Bechtel said.

It will examine such problems as what image will a high-level nuclear dump create and whether that will affect tourism and conventions, he said.

Bechtel, of Clark County's Department of Comprehensive Planning, represents the Clark County on the three-county planning group.

"We want an honest appraisal of what the impacts will be," he said in remarks during and after a meeting of the county Environmental Quality Policy Review Board. "We've had some problems with Washington (D.C.)," he said of some Energy Department assessments of the dump's impact.

While the local Energy Department office has displayed "a greater sensitivity" in dealing with area concerns, the federal government has provided sometimes vague or ambiguous information, he said.

"There seems to be a shifting of (federal) gears sometimes in the proposal with no rationale for what's happening," he said.

For example, the federal government at one time said the dump construction project would employ about 6,000 workers but more recently has cut that figure in half, he said. The Energy Department also told city and county representatives that the project would have no negative impact on Southern Nevada's tourism, but local officials remain skeptical, he said.

"We're not totally into the negative," he said. But he suggested the study will not gloss over any blemishes.

Bechtel also said study results could give Nevadans leverage in dealing with federal plans should the Energy Department decide on the Yucca Mountain site. Federal planners could be prevailed upon to adapt their plans to regional and local needs, he said.

Mountain West began collecting data for the study in September and will complete data collection June 30, after which the study's first phases should be ready.

DOE: Nuke dump search at full speed

Associated Press

SEATTLE — The search for a national nuclear waste dump will proceed at full speed despite a congressional staff report that alleges the selection process was rigged, says the head of the search program.

Ben Rusche, director of the Department of Energy's Office of Civilian Radioactive Waste Management, said that last week's congressional approval of $499 million in DOE funding means a "political consensus stil is in existence ... to develop a safe disposal system for spent fuel" from commercial nuclear reactors.

"We will proceed vigorously with our work," Rusche said.

Addressing utility and nuclear energy officials in Charleston, S.C., Rusche called the funding a "miracle," given the outcry over the way his department selected three possible Western sites for a national repository for highly radioactive nuclear waste.

The sites are the Hanford nuclear reservation in Eastern Washington, Yucca Mountain in Nevada and Deaf Smith County, Texas.

Rusche said no funds are available for immediate drilling at any of the three sites, but predicted drilling soon after fiscal 1988 begins next October.

Some members of Congress are accusing the DOE of rewriting scientific and technical documents to support a decision to remove Richton Dome, Miss., and add Hanford to the list of finalists.

Four congressmen whose staffs have compiled a detailed investigative report of how the DOE selected the sites wrote Secretary of Energy John Herrington to demand the process be begun anew.

Democratic Reps. Al Swift of Washington, Ed Markey of Massachusetts and James Weaver and Roy Wyden of Oregon said wholesale changes were made in DOE's reports.

Detlof von Winterfeldt, a consultant to the board of radioactive waste management of the National Academy of Science, said, "The analysis clearly identifies Hanford as the overall loser among the five sites" that were under consideration before the DOE narrowed the field to three on May 28.

DOE draft reports and memos released by congressional investigators indicate DOE officials downplayed or even eliminated health, safety and cost factors in order to justify naming Hanford on of the top three.

The documents say top DOE officials began to manipulate data and edit reports sometime last February.

Congressional investigator and attorney Dan Meek said DOE officials manipulated scientific and technical data repeatedly and sometimes interjected purely subjective statements.

DOE spokeswoman Ginger King said DOE stands by its decision and will reply to the congressional report within 30 days.

Among the documents released by the congressional investigators was a memo by Thomas Isaacs, deputy associate director of the repository program, who wrote the "new write-up blatantly manipulates the methodology and its application to force it to spit out the 'proper sites.' It throws out certain factors, arbitrarily reduces or increases the value of others, (and) picks certain tradeoffs as better than others."

DOE officials and congressional investigators agree Hanford's best point is the fact it is 570 square miles already owned by the government and used for nuclear plants and weapons facilities.

DOE's studies also show ground water at Hanford might carry radioactive leaks to the Columbia River sooner than similar leaks would get into water systems at other sites.

Meek said beginning in February, anti-Hanford documents were drafted and quashed.

For example, a briefing paper prepared for Rusche in March said "nothing less than a several billion dollar error" in cost estimates could make Hanford a top contender. It said Nevada was the "clear choice" over Hanford.