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NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION  
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TO: Mr. Robert E. Browning, Director, HLWM  
FROM: Paul T. Prestholt, Sr. On-Site Licensing Representative  
DATE: January 15, 1988  
SUBJECT: Newspaper Articles

Please find enclosed more information that appeared in  
our local newspaper that is of interest.

PTP:nan

cc: Mr. Greg Cook  
Ms. Sue Gagner

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PDR WASTE PDR  
WM-11

## Nuke waste delay requested

Associated Press

SANTA FE, N.M. — Storage of radioactive waste in an underground repository in southeastern New Mexico should be delayed until more is known about the possibility that water could seep into the facility, a scientist recommended Wednesday.

"The concern about a 'wet' repository is valid and real," geologist Lokesh Chaturvedi wrote in a report to a state task force on radioactive waste.

Chaturvedi is with the Environmental Evaluation Group, a federally funded body that monitors the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant for the state of New Mexico.

The pilot plant, located in thick salt beds 2,100 feet under the ground east of Carlsbad, is the nation's designated repository for highly radioactive garbage produced by defense contractors and laboratories. Shipments of high-

level waste for experiments to see how well the repository performs have been scheduled to begin in October.

Scientists are raising warnings about WIPP because of predictions that seepage of brine into storage rooms will eventually corrode the storage drums and cause them to leak underground.

Some fear that someone exploration for oil or gas hundreds of years in the future could bring the radioactive material to the surface, contaminating the land and people.

EEG Director Robert Neill told the task force that a pressurized waste slurry — a mixture of water and radioactive material — could exist 100 to 200 years after the repository is permanently closed.

The potential problems of seeping brine have been identified by a number of scientific groups, including the EEG and the National Academy of Sciences Panel for WIPP.

"Considering that the WIPP repository is a much needed final solution to the defense (radioactive) waste disposal problem, delaying operational timing by months to even a few years to make it a safer repository will be wise," Chaturvedi recommended.

Besides a delay in the operation of WIPP, Chaturvedi recommended that the Department of Energy change its design to include a different fill around the containers, and permit only "valid and genuine" experiments for the first five years of the plant's operation.

# Laxalt: Reid at fault for nuke dump

By Ed Vogel  
Review-Journal Capital Bureau

CARSON CITY — An angry Paul Laxalt said Thursday that Sen. Harry Reid deserves the blame for the federal decision that earmarks Nevada for a nuclear waste repository.

In a prepared statement, former Sen. Laxalt responded with no holds barred to a story in which Reid, D-Nev., blamed him for not doing enough to keep the repository out of Nevada.

Reid said Laxalt did "zip" to keep nuclear waste out of Nevada during his 12 years in the Senate. He also said Laxalt is President Reagan's best friend and yet Nevada has been singled out for the repository.

"The plain fact is Harry blew it and everybody in Washington knows it," Laxalt said. "He is looking for a patsy to blame, but it is not going to be Paul Laxalt."

Laxalt said it was largely because of his efforts in 1986 that Congress stopped studies at Yucca Mountain, the proposed nuclear repository site about 110 miles northwest of Las Vegas.

"Harry Reid knew it was a spectacular victory and he tried to take credit," Laxalt said. "Laxalt couldn't have done it without me." Harry was quoted as saying.

Laxalt said he has been out of the Senate for a year and that he finds it odd that Reid could blame him for a decision that occurred in December.

"When the Democrats took control of Congress in 1987, Harry Reid, as a member of the majority, assumed the responsibilities that comes with majority status," Laxalt said.

Laxalt said it was Reid's Democratic colleagues who cut the "nasty deal" that essentially has brought the nuclear dump to Nevada.

The deal left Reid "with egg on

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## Laxalt

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his face," Laxalt said.

Since his retirement, Laxalt said he has tried to avoid second-guessing his former colleagues. He said he declined interviews when reporters asked him to comment on the repository deal in December.

When Reid criticized him in Thursday's newspaper, Laxalt said he decided he had no choice but to respond. "He had the temerity to blame me for a nuclear waste deal that was cut in Congress a few days ago by his Democratic colleagues," Laxalt said.

In the earlier story, however, Reid blamed Laxalt more for the overall movement over the years to put the repository in Nevada rather than the recent decision selecting Yucca Mountain as the site.

He also was critical of recent Review-Journal columns by former Rep. Jim Santini, in which his leadership abilities were questioned. Santini was Reid's opponent in the 1986 Senate race.

## Another view

# Fear mongers cloud nuke dump issue

*The following is written by R. Guild Gray.*

**T**hanks to Thomas Zalatel, a student reporter from the SUN Youth Forum, I have been shamed into speaking out against some of Nevada's most powerful politicians. With the refreshing candor of youth and with opinion backed by cogent and patriotic argument, young Zalatel wrote, "... my group was in favor of locating a nuclear repository in our state."

In fear of reprisal by some holding high office, I know many adults who have been standing idly by while fear mongers have been taking advantage of the general public's ignorance of subjects nuclear. It's time we let our youth and Nevadans generally know there are a substantial number of adults who may be cowed but are certainly not being duped by demagoguery.

The thoughts expressed here are not for the purpose of insinuating that all who oppose a nuclear repository in Nevada are fear mongers and rabble rousers; but they are intended to express a judgment that some are.

At the same time some of our politicians are accusing Congress of making only political decisions on a nuclear repository, they are using the subject for their personal political enhancement with fear mongering followed by hollow pledges of doing all in their power to save Nevada from catastrophe.

Many times a year for years, the Nevada Test Site is being further contaminated. The same politicians who make no effort to discontinue atomic testing in Nevada cry loudly against controlled nuclear waste storage. Can it be that the many thousands of votes of those dependent upon atomic testing for all or part of their livelihoods make atomic testing safe, but the lack of such a bloc of votes makes controlled nuclear storage unsafe?

There are four questions. Who can really believe the fear mongers' hypothetical statements that nuclear waste at the Nevada Test Site will damage Nevada's tourist industry? The more realistic damages of a catastrophic earthquake in California does not keep tourists from Disneyland, the California cities or the parks, trails and ski slopes of the Sierras. Neither has the earthquake threat kept California from becoming a great industrial state or the most populous state in the Union. Certainly our gaming and resort entrepreneurs don't seem to be concerned with the demagogues' dire predictions of the fate of tourism should Yucca Mountain become a nuclear repository site; else why the current and contemplated hotel construction programs.

My comments here are not meant to ignore the potential danger of the several temporary nuclear waste repositories scattered across the nation. The key word is temporary. The problems of temporary disposal as arguments for opposing a controlled permanent site in a carefully and scientifically established location is part of the mongering. We cannot turn back the clock. We are living in an atomic age. We must find a permanent place

for nuclear waste and or a place for reprocessing nuclear waste.

It's good to know that those of us in Clark County who speak out against the fear mongers are not alone. Many, if not most, living nearest to the Nevada Test Site and the present nuclear repositories on the site and off the site in Nye County are in favor of the project. Not all of the state's newspapers have joined the parade which many of our politicians are trying to lead with their deceitful pledges of saving Nevada from catastrophe. The words below come from an editorial in the Elko Daily Free Press.

"All the rantings and ravings we have been hearing about federal proposals to establish a 'nuclear waste dump' in Nevada amount to hokum. It seems to us a facility in Nevada capable of producing nuclear fuel and using a 'raw material' other people are anxious to 'dump' at the facility's doorway ought to be a real money-maker. Some scientists have observed, by the way, the 'nuclear waste' to be processed at such a facility is safer to handle than the uranium ore that occurs naturally — so safety is not a legitimate issue.

"U.S. Sen. Chic Hecht, although he has been too timid to come out in favor of a 'nuclear waste dump' in Nevada, has come closer than any other politician we have noticed to telling the plain truth about the situation.

"He said in a recent news release that he regards reprocessing spent nuclear fuel as 'the only scientifically sound means of handling nuclear waste. ...' He added, 'It just doesn't make any sense to stick it in the ground somewhere when you can burn it up instead.'

"But Hecht doesn't seem to be drawing the popular support he deserves with his honest and accurate assessment of the 'nuclear waste' issue. The fear mongers and the demagogues seem to be doing as well in Nevada as they are in Maine, and we can't explain it. Our bewilderment persists."

The problem of nuclear waste isn't going to go away for a long time — maybe never. It appears now that Nevada will be chosen as a nuclear waste repository if additional scientific studies and exploratory work at the Yucca Mountain site indicate a reasonable suitability of the site for storing nuclear waste. Instead of feeling sorry for ourselves and castigating members of Congress, it seems to many of us that the sensible thing to do is to learn to live with what may be the inevitable in a mentally healthy way, just as we have learned to live with atomic testing in our backyard. If our politicians haven't already destroyed the possibility with their vitriolic vehemence, let us use the problem to our advantage.

It may not be too late to get the carrots which were once proposed to go with the repository. Let's work at it. Let's expend the energy some are using in vituperation to help Sen. Hecht promote his suggestions for the nuclear waste problem. By doing so, his plan, together with our new engineering school and the pool of atomic scientists already available in Clark County, could make Southern Nevada a major science center in the nation.

# Vucanovich advocates Pacific nuke dump site

Continued from Page 1A Nevada's throat. If there is a way, this is our chance.

cy Act Amendments of 1987, a federal negotiator appointed by the president may deal with states or Indian tribes interested in hosting the repository, she said.

Besides the continental United States, "state" means the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, the Northern Mariana Islands, the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands and the Marshall Islands.

Vucanovich explained that although these "freely associated states" are considered foreign countries by the federal government, the U.S. still has responsibility for their defense.

During the marathon budget process last month, Vucanovich said she was approached by Marshall Island representatives and the State Department.

"At the time, I thought they were crazy," she said. "The State Department considers it a serious request."

Under the new law Vucanovich said she will urge President Reagan to appoint a federal negotiator as soon as possible, and that the Marshall Islands proposal be considered.

Why did the Marshall Islands representatives seek participation in the project? "They asked for a repository for economic development reasons," Vucanovich said. "If the repository proves suitable, this would be a way for the Marshall Islands to become economically independent."

"The negotiator is the key," she said. "There are other answers than jamming it (the dump) down

They are asking for the necessary studies to be considered as a potential host site for the repository," she said.

Energy Department spokesman Chris West in Las Vegas said DOE has assured the State Department that when the negotiator has been appointed the proposal will be presented for consideration. He added that a Defense Department contractor still operates on Johnston Atoll in the Pacific Islands.

Some of the Marshall Islands have previously been used for testing nuclear weapons by the United States, and the U.S. Geologic Survey has already done some



REP. BARBARA VUCANOVICH  
... Furious with Congress

testing at the geologic formations where a repository could be located, Vucanovich noted.

Congress has been studying a request for at least \$100 million to clean up Bikini Island, contaminated from U.S. atomic weapons tests. The cleanup could take 10 years or more, since islanders were allowed to return in the late 1960s and then removed once again, when evidence of radiation contamination appeared in their food supplies.

"Certainly, there must be extensive further studies done on this proposal before we know if the Marshall Islands would be a suitable site, and studies done on the transportation issues involved," Vucanovich said.

"My purpose is to ensure that the proposal gets the attention it deserves from the Department of Energy and from the negotiator appointed by the president," she said.

In 1986 Nevada, Texas and Washington were named for study as the nation's first high-level nuclear repository.

## Vucanovich wants nuke dump site in Pacific

By Mary Manning  
SUN Staff Writer

Furious at Congress targeting Nevada as the nation's high-level nuclear repository, Rep. Barbara Vucanovich, R-Nev., said Wednesday she supports efforts by Marshall Islands officials to be studied as a potential dump site.

"I was appalled by last month's high-level nuclear waste repository (decision) targeting Nevada for the nuclear waste site," Vucanovich said.

The nuclear waste package naming Yucca Mountain exclusively was approved under a budget appropriations bill in the waning hours of Congress. The nuclear dump section was known as the "screw Nevada" bill.

Yet under Nuclear Waste Poli-  
See VUCANOVICH, Page 5A

## Reid: Odds favor Yucca Mountain

CARSON CITY (UPI) — Sen. Harry Reid, D-Nev., said Wednesday a suggestion that high level nuclear waste should be buried in the Marshall Islands should be studied but he doesn't hold much hope this is an alternative to the proposed dump at Yucca Mountain in Southern Nevada.

"I wish it would go to the Marshall Islands," Reid told newsmen. But he said there were "tremendously difficult transportation obstacles" in shipping nuclear waste to the islands in the Pacific Ocean.

"The odds are we will get the nuclear dump," he said.

# Reid thinks state won't be able to stop nuke dump

Las Vegas Review-Journal/Tuesday, January 12, 1988

By Jon Ralston  
Review-Journal

Sen. Harry Reid, D-Nev., said Monday that "tremendous pressure" will be put on the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to license the high-level waste dump at Yucca Mountain, making it more likely that the repository will become a reality.

Reid also denigrated an amendment to the nuclear waste disposal bill sponsored by Sen. Chic Hecht, R-Nev., that asks Congress to give Nevada "special consideration" on federal projects in exchange for accepting the dump.

Hecht, responding later to Reid's criticism, said the Democrat's comments were "politically motivated" because he is helping Gov. Richard Bryan's still-unannounced challenge for Hecht's seat.

While Bryan and Hecht recently have expressed optimism that the dump may never be constructed, Reid said in a Las Vegas interview, "I guess I'm kind of a pessimist."

"Congress not only told them (the National Regulatory Commis-

sion) to build the facility, but they essentially said they have to come back (with a license)," said Reid, referring to the congressional bill passed last year that limits the selection process to the Nevada site.

The measure also would force Congress to abandon its nuclear waste disposal program if Yucca Mountain proves scientifically unsuitable.

Reid said he obviously hopes that the repository never is built, but he added, "I think realistically it's going to take three things to stop the dump from coming now:

—Science: Reid said he hopes the site's proximity to Southern California earthquakes, the explosions at the Nevada Test Site and potential leakage problems will induce scientists to disqualify Yucca Mountain.

—Nature: Reid, echoing Hecht's call for alternatives to burying the waste underground, said he hopes the scientists realize "deep geologic siting is not what we should do."

—Transportation: Reid said he

Please see REID/6B



Rene Germanier/Review-Journal

**REID SPEAKS** - Sen. Harry Reid, D-Nev., said he is less optimistic that a nuclear repository will not come to Nevada.

## Reid

From 1B

hopes to promote an awareness among his congressional colleagues of the dangers of "transporting nuclear waste through the streets" of other states on its way to Nevada.

Reid also scoffed at the notion of Nevada receiving preferential treatment on lucrative federal projects because "of Hecht's amendment to the nuclear waste bill."

"Why would they (give special consideration)?" Reid asked.

"For what reason?" Reid asked. "Although Reid said he thinks Congress "owes us a lot" for sticking the dump in Nevada, he added, "They don't think so. They think it (the dump) is safe."

Reid said that claiming Nevada will be helped by the Hecht amendment is "just a lot of talk."

Hecht, in an interview later, said, "It's a lot better to have it

(the amendment) than not to have it."

The GOP senator also said Reid's comments should be discounted because he "has come out very strong and said he would work very hard for Dick Bryan for the Senate."

"That certainly casts doubts about what he says from now on," Hecht said. "It's a politically motivated speech. Harry Reid is being paid \$90,000 a year and he was elected by the people of Nevada to represent Nevada. I don't think he's being paid that amount of money to campaign against Chic Hecht."

Reid, who has said he would do "whatever it takes" to help Bryan beat Hecht, already has helped the governor raise money, form a campaign organization and hire a media consultant, Michael Kaye & Associates, that he used in his own successful 1986 Senate bid.