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TO: Mr. Robert E. Browning, Director, HLWM
FROM: Paul T. Prestholt, Sr. On-Site Licensing Representative
DATE: December 17, 1987
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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WM Projects WM-11
PDR w/encl
(Return to WM, 623-SS)

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Bryan angry with political deals struck for Yucca Mountain site

By Laura Wingard
Review-Journal

Gov. Richard Bryan used a state commission meeting Tuesday in Las Vegas as a forum to reiterate his disgust at the political deals being cut in Congress to make Yucca Mountain the only site studied for a high-level nuclear waste dump.

But in an unscheduled address to the Nevada Commission on Nuclear Projects, Bryan said Nevada still has a chance to fight the dump being built at Yucca Mountain, 110 miles northwest of Las Vegas.

The scientific data gathered so far by the state shows the site is geologically unsound for the repository and Nevada can sue to stop it from being built, he said.

If studies by the U.S. Department of Energy find the site is suitable for the dump, the governor also can veto the Yucca Mountain selection, Bryan said. Under federal law, however, Congress can override the veto.

"Anyone of these things can be altered by the same Congress that seems bent on putting the dump in Nevada and not the other two potential sites in Texas

and Washington, Bryan added.

The governor appeared to still be reeling from the announcement Monday that House negotiators have decided to let the Energy Department spend \$1.5 billion to study only Yucca Mountain as the site for the nation's first high-level nuclear waste dump.

"I say shame, shame, shame on the Congress," Bryan said. "They don't even pretend this is fair, reasonable or good public policy."

Bryan and Nevada's congressional delegation were banking on sympathetic House negotiators, including Rep. Morris Udall, D-Ariz., working out a deal with Sen. J. Bennett Johnston, D-La., to stop the dump search for 18 months to allow an independent panel of experts to evaluate whether the Energy Department had violated the 1982 Nuclear Waste Policy Act.

Johnston advocated legislation, approved by the Senate, that was called the "Screw Nevada Bill" because it appeared to target Yucca Mountain without naming the site specifically. But the House negotiators, apparently reneging on their support for a moratori-

um, came out in favor of naming Yucca Mountain as the only site to be studied.

The action by House negotiators left the nuclear power industry "the big winners in this fight," Bryan said. "The nuclear power industry apparently exercises enormous power with the Congress."

Bryan refused to say his remarks about the nuclear power industry's influence over Congress were meant to criticize Sen. Chic Hecht, R-Nev. The American Nuclear Energy Council, a lobbying arm of the nuclear power industry, recently held a fundraising event for Hecht.

Democrat Bryan is expected to challenge Hecht next year for his Senate seat. In the past, Bryan has accused Hecht of being slow to come out against the dump being built in Nevada.

Hecht has blamed the latest congressional wrangling on House Democrats showing their "true colors" by supporting the dump in Nevada. "They put forward this proposal, which really sticks it to us," he said.

Lawmakers struggle for compromise on nuclear waste program

By Steve Tetreault
Review-Journal Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — Lawmakers worked behind the scenes on Wednesday, trying to reach a compromise on a new nuclear waste program or else set the stage for what was described as a gamble for Nevada.

On Wednesday night, negotiators from the House and Senate were meeting behind closed doors in an undisclosed room in the Capitol. There, they were expected to try once again to reach agreement on legislation revamping the nation's nuclear waste program. The sticking point remained

whether to authorize "monitored retrievable storage" in an Eastern or Southern state to allow high-level nuclear waste to be cooled and packaged.

The Senate has passed legislation containing an MRS, while House negotiators oppose it adamantly.

For Nevada, the outcome of negotiations could determine whether Yucca Mountain near the Nevada Test Site becomes the first site to be tested to become the nation's first high-level nuclear waste dump.

Any compromise would be considered likely to pass Congress in

the days remaining before Christmas recess. If a compromise remained elusive on MRS, however, an key negotiator said Wednesday House members were prepared to try to kill the Senate bill, which is sponsored by Sen. J. Bennett Johnston, D-La.

"If we can't resolve this to every-

one's satisfaction, we'll go to the House floor," said Rep. Butler Derrick, D-S.C.

The Johnston bill also has come to be known as the "Screw Nevada Bill" because it also accelerates the selection of a permanent nuclear dump in a way officials believe far

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From 1A

gets Yucca Mountain.

A Nevada lobbyist and another source with the state said Wednesday the activity was part of a strategy devised over the past few days by House negotiators in the hopes of killing the Johnston bill if they could not knock out the MRS.

If successful, the strategy could kill for this year the "Screw Nevada Bill," they said.

But the strategy does carry risk for Nevada. If it fails, Yucca Mountain could wind being declared the top — and only — candidate for the nuclear waste dump.

One Nevadan said he was told by a negotiator, "We're shooting craps with your state's interest."

In classic Capitol Hill intrigue, House negotiators Wednesday obtained the OK of House Speaker James Wright, D-Texas, for their plan. They convened meetings in back rooms and on and off the House floor to discuss it.

"This is almost like secret arms talks," said one lawmaker.

Although they are not members of the negotiating teams, Sen. Harry Reid, D-Nev., and Rep. Jim Billray, D-Nev., were closely monitoring the events.

"Where we are now is there have

been a number of exchanges. The House is giving the Senate a proposal, and that has to be worked out tonight," Reid said Wednesday night.

"The House leadership has said if you don't work it out tonight, there will be no nuclear waste bill this year," Reid said.

He said the House proposal expected to be offered to senators Wednesday night was "not an MRS, but something like an MRS." Others said the plan linked the MRS to a study.

Wright Andrews, a Washington lobbyist hired by Nevada for nuclear waste, said the strategy presents "a very dicey situation" for Nevada, but one in which the state has little choice.

In order to kill the Johnston bill, the House would be asked to vote on a substitute. The substitute rules out an MRS authorization. But it directs the Energy Department to do nuclear waste site characterization tests on Yucca Mountain while ceasing all work at the two other sites, in Washington and Texas, that have been proposed for the dump.

That substitute plan was unveiled Monday, and drew consternation at the time from Nevada

officials.

Nevada officials "would not have taken this risk," Andrews said, but House leaders "left us in the dark on this" until this week.

"Yucca Mountain is tied to this whether we like it or not," Andrews said.

Said another Nevadan, "It's not our choice. It's not among our first five choices. It was a choice made for us."

House leaders expect the House would pass the substitute bill since it frees Easterners and Southerners from worry about hosting an MRS, and it singles out one state — Nevada — for the nuclear dump, strategists said Wednesday.

What they then hope is that, faced with the House bill, Johnston will set aside the entire nuclear waste issue this year rather than giving the Senate a choice between his bill, which targets some easterners or southerners for an MRS, or a popular House bill that gives all of them a way out of hosting interim nuclear storage.

Johnston could not be reached Wednesday night for comment, and it was not known what moves he might be preparing in return.

Said one participant in the struggle: "This is like watching master chess players play chess."

REVIEW-JOURNAL

LAS VEGAS

Turncoat allies target Nevada for radioactive waste

The most recent developments on the high-level nuclear waste dump brought to mind a sorry episode from the Carter administration. Carter had just negotiated the SALT II treaty with the Soviet Union and received assurances of the Soviets' peaceful intentions. Then, just a few months later, Soviet tanks rolled across the border into Afghanistan.

Carter's remark? "They lied to me."

Well, apparently, our people in Washington got lied to, too. The people in the House who were supposed to be concerned about Nevada's interests turned on us, attacking us from behind like rabid pit bulls.

Consider the story that ran in the R-J on Dec. 10 that said, in part:

"Two congressmen opposed to putting a high-level nuclear waste dump in Nevada will be on the congressional committee that tries to work out a compromise on a Senate bill that some claim targets Yucca Mountain for the dump.

"Sen. J. Bennett Johnston, D-La., who authored the so-called 'Screw Nevada bill,' agreed ... to include Rep. Morris Udall, D-Ariz., and Rep. John Dingell, D-Mich., in negotiations on the bill. Both representatives oppose the legislation...

"Although Reid called Wednesday's agreement 'great news for Nevada,' he added, 'We're still fighting an uphill battle, but the odds that we can hold our own just got better.'"

Wrong, Harry. They lied to you.

The "great news" for Nevada was that these two legislators, in which Reid and many Nevadans placed their faith, helped invent an anti-Nevada bill — a House version — of their own.

Not only did they not try to block the dump, they helped draw up legislation that does everything but guarantee Nevada will get it. The House negotiating team, of which Udall and Dingell were members, came up with a proposal that declares Yucca Mountain to be the first — and only — choice for site studies designed to declare the location acceptable for the radioactive waste dump.

The negotiated proposal would halt work at the two other front-running sites in Washington and Texas. Said Rep. Al Swift, one of the negotiators: "We say this is going to Yucca Mountain, period. End of report." Cold, Mr. Swift, but, unfortunately true.

According to Swift, House negotiators on Monday decided to scrap their earlier opposition to Johnston's Screw Nevada Bill and instead "take it to its logical extreme" of specifically targeting Nevada — something Johnston's bill only implied but did not state outright.

Not surprisingly, Harry Reid was mum about the apparent treachery of his erstwhile allies, Dingell and Udall.

Sen. Chic Hecht, however, had plenty to say, noting that the House Democrats had "shown their true colors. They had sold some people a bill of goods that they were going to work against a single site in Nevada. Then they put forward a proposal which really sticks it to us."

Yes, indeed.

From a purely objective point of view, however, imagine how things probably look from a Washington perspective:

The future of the nation's commercial nuclear energy program depends on finding a place to bury high-level waste. Out there, far to the west, in the middle of nowhere lie Yucca Mountain and Bullfrog County, Nev., a place specifically designed for the dump. Nearby, they've been testing atomic weapons for decades. The place is arid, already contaminated and unpopulated. Nevada will take it — Nevada, like Mikey, will take anything.

So, as has been their practice in the past, the feds decide to treat Nevada like some colonial possession and stick us with the nuclear gunk — most of it generated in the East, none of it in Nevada — that nobody wants. Nevadans don't want it either, but there are too few of us with too little clout in Congress to stop it, as events this week so painfully proved.

In the game of nuclear tag, we're it.

Gov. Bryan takes Nevadans who want nuclear dump to task

By Erik Kirschbaum
SUN Staff Writer

Gov. Richard Bryan, saying the state has been "betrayed," Tuesday blasted with unusually harsh language both the federal Department of Energy and a small number of Nevadans for pushing the state perilously close to being selected as the nation's first high-level nuclear waste repository.

Speaking before the Nevada Nuclear Commission at its monthly meeting in Las Vegas a day after both houses of Congress began moving to make Yucca Mountain the nation's nuclear waste dump, Bryan ripped into the Congress for "clearly violating" laws and for "disgracing itself" with its "vicious action."

Sites in Washington state and Texas had previously been included with Nevada for study as a possible nuclear waste repository. But on Monday, an amendment attached to an appropriations bill to only examine one site — Yucca Mountain — was proposed in the House, setting in motion a possible forthcoming vote that would name Yucca as the lone site to be studied.

Bryan said he will lead the state to fight against studying only the Nevada site, located 100 miles northwest of Las Vegas, and that he has no intention of surrendering.

"Congress has disgraced itself," Bryan said. "This is a sad commentary on how the legislative body in Washington conducts its business. Shame, shame, shame on Congress. It has divorced itself of all fairness and rational thought. It's blatantly irresponsible. This is a tyranny of the majority. These actions portend a disaster for Nevada unless this is reversed."

But rather than despair about the drift toward naming Nevada as the nation's first — and only — repository that would store 40 years' worth of the nation's accumulated nuclear waste, Bryan said he will fight with scientific evidence and legal means to keep the dump out of the state. He said if all other avenues fail, he will exercise his right as governor to veto the measure.

"Nevadans have to understand that we have scientific data that shows the site is unsuitable. People in this state ought to be shocked and offended. This shows the people that if you're big

and powerful, you can beat up on small states like Nevada. You can cast fairness to the four winds, which is what has happened.

"Any fair process would reach that conclusion. All rules will now be bent to make it fit this site. They'll say, 'Well, maybe this deficiency isn't so bad. People are biased going in and will look to make it fit' rather than fairly and objectively looking for the best site."

Calling it a "sad day for Nevada," Bryan responded with unusually harsh words to reports that members of Nevada's four-person congressional delegation had met secretly with key senators in favor of placing the dump in Nevada and with nuclear industry lobbyists, who want to expedite the selection of the dump.

"Our efforts are being undermined by all the misguided people who whisper in the ears of influential congressmen that Nevada is willing to take the dump," said Bryan, who was later unwilling to name which Nevada legislators he was suggesting betrayed the state, because "so far they're only reports."

He did say, however: "We have strong indicators

that officials from Nye County have acted not in concert with the wishes of Nevada. Clearly, we have been damaged by those types of activities."

"Some folks are trying to play this both ways," Bryan said, alluding to legislators he believes ostensibly tell Nevadans that they're opposed to the repository, but who actually tell other congressmen that they are not so strongly opposed to the bill. "They'll have to answer to their constituents. That's not responsible, and it undermines us. The important thing now is not to cave in."

When asked, however, if Bryan's signature on the bill that created Bullfrog County — an unpopulated section of Nye County where the dump would lie and a device to distribute money for the dump around the state — sent a signal to Congress that Nevada wanted the dump, the governor flatly rejected the notion.

"That's a red herring," Bryan said. "No one believes that indicates we want it."

Las Vegas Mayor Ron Lurie, who sits on the Nuclear Commission, added of the Energy Department: "They lie to you, they cheat you, and they're deceitful. This is a sad example of what they're doing."