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UNITED STATES
NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
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TO: Mr. Robert E. Browning, Director
FROM: Paul T. Prestholt, Sr. OR - NNWSI
DATE: August 14, 1986
SUBJECT: Newspaper Articles

Please find attached recent articles that appeared in our local newspaper. Again, I believe you will find them to be of interest.

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Attachments

WM Record File

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WM Project

Docket No.

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Distribution: RDM Justus

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Thursday, August 14, 1986
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Nuke dump funds sliced

Senate panel cuts budget to halt work at top sites

By David Koenig
Review-Journal Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — The Senate Appropriations Committee agreed Wednesday to a one-year cut in funds for testing at Yucca Mountain and two other potential nuclear waste dumps.

Sen. Paul Laxalt, R-Nev., hailed the vote as "a significant victory for Nevada," and a rebuke to the federal Energy Department for its "sloppy

work and arrogance in conducting the search for a high-level nuclear waste repository.

Laxalt invoked the images of the Soviet nuclear disaster at Chernobyl and the space shuttle explosion as examples of technology gone wrong, and said the safety of land disposal of radioactive waste should be re-examined.

Rep. Harry Reid, D-Nev., said he was pleased by the vote, but called it

"a very, very minor victory" in the state's fight against the dump.

Reagan administration officials vowed to fight to keep the selection process going full-steam.

The Appropriations Committee decision — agreed to without an actual vote — reflected a behind-the-scenes deal worked out by Laxalt and three other senators.

Under the deal, the committee recommended cutting next year's bud-

get for the federal nuclear waste program by almost half, to \$380 million. Sen. Mark Hatfield, R-Ore., chairman of the panel, said the effect would be to stop all work at Yucca Mountain, Hanford, Wash., and Deaf Smith County, Texas, while allowing general research to continue.

The funding cut, part of a fiscal 1987 spending bill for the Energy Department, must still be approved. Please see DUMPS.

Dumps

From 1A

by the full Senate. And, because the House rejected — by a 351-68 vote — a proposal to cut funding for the selection process, it must also be approved by a conference committee of Senate and House members.

The Reagan administration wanted \$769 million for the repository program and the House approved \$690 million, so the Senate appropriations figure is well below both.

Western lawmakers have stepped up their attacks on the repository program since May, when Energy Secretary John Herrington suspended the search for a second high-level nuclear waste dump in the East. But two other attempts in Congress to derail the West-only dump search failed, and the battle shifted to the Senate Appropriations Committee.

Laxalt originally proposed that the committee make even deeper cuts in the repository selection program. But an Eastern senator, Warren Rudman, R-N.H., countered by proposing to cut all money for studies of an Eastern dump, while approving money to study the Nevada, Washington and Texas sites, according to two sources familiar with the issue.

Laxalt made an emotional, table-

pounding speech at the close of the committee's discussion. Laxalt said the Energy Department selection process is flawed because "the work has been sloppy, it has been arrogant" and "makes no sense."

Laxalt, who is bucking the Reagan administration, with which he is so closely identified, said he has "attempted to be a good soldier in this, but it hasn't been easy in Nevada to tell my people that we must be a responsible member of the union."

Although Laxalt said Nevada has been "targeted" so far, he believes that if the state got the dump after a fair selection process, "we will go along."

But Laxalt said he doubted "that you're ever going to have storage of this sort in the continental United States anywhere." The vehement reaction to nuclear waste in the East shows "that this may be politically unacceptable, and perhaps that's justified," he said.

He said a one-year delay will allow the courts to sort out 23 lawsuits filed against the federal government and let the three Western states do independent research into safety at their sites.

Despite the setback in the Senate

committee, the Reagan administration will fight for full funding of the repository program, said Robert Aiken, the Energy Department's Senate liaison.

Laxalt was upbeat after the committee meeting, saying, "I feel pretty good about it. I think we've won a significant victory for Nevada today."

Reid said, "It's a help and I'm glad I participated in it. But we have a long, long ways to go to keep the poison out of the state of Nevada."

Reid said the committee's action won't stop the site selection process, and that Nevadans should not think the battle against the dump has been won.

Reid has used the nuclear waste dump as an issue in his campaign for the Senate, criticizing the state's three Republicans in Congress for not stating outright opposition to the consideration of Yucca Mountain. Reid said the move to cut funds won't be seen as a Republican victory by Laxalt, and thus won't hurt his campaign against Republican Jim Santini.

Rep. Barbara Vucanovich, R-Nev., called the Senate committee's vote "exactly what I wanted to see."

Nevadans optimistic on Laxalt influence to halt nuke research

By Ed Vogel
Review-Journal Capital Bureau

CARSON CITY — Nevada leaders expressed cautious optimism Wednesday that the political clout of Sen. Paul Laxalt, R-Nev., will ultimately stop nuclear waste research at Yucca Mountain and two other sites.

Laxalt on Wednesday pushed an amendment through the Senate Appropriations Committee that withdraws funds the U.S. Department of Energy needs to continue research at Yucca Mountain, 100 miles northwest of Las Vegas, and sites in Texas and Washington. The government has named the three areas as finalists for the nation's first high-level nuclear repository.

"It is a step in the right direction," Gov. Richard Bryan said. "It gives us time to strengthen our legal case and make Congress more aware of what went into the site selection decision."

"The effect may be to put pressure on Congress to set a new direction," added Joseph Strolin, a key member of the Nevada Nuclear Waste Project Office.

The nuclear waste office, which monitors Yucca Mountain developments for the state, has accused the federal government of ignoring laws

in an apparent move to push the repository to Yucca Mountain. Bryan also has been particularly critical about the government's decision to postpone research in the East on a second repository.

About 85 percent of the nation's high-level nuclear waste is generated at nuclear power plants in the East. Nevada has no nuclear power plants.

After Yucca Mountain was named a repository finalist in May, the state filed five lawsuits in federal court in San Francisco challenging the Energy Department's selection procedures.

Strolin said the state wants Congress to throw out its present repository research and begin again with a program that is fair to all states.

He warned residents not to become overly optimistic about the latest development. Strolin pointed out the vote only came in a Senate committee and the full Senate still must approve the action. Then the House of Representatives must back the termination of the studies.

Earlier this month, the House voted overwhelmingly to continue repository research.

Democrat Bryan, who earlier urged Republican Laxalt to use his

power to keep Yucca Mountain from becoming a repository finalist, saluted the senator's effort but emphasized he still wants Laxalt to come out unequivocally against the dump.

Laxalt has said he would withhold his judgment until the actual repository site is selected. A decision on the repository-site may be made in 1991.

Former Rep. Jim Santini, D-Nev., now a Republican candidate for the U.S. Senate, said he is confident that Laxalt has the power to kill the project in the full Senate.

"This clout (Laxalt's) got the job started and now there is beautiful light at the end of the tunnel," said Santini, in a prepared statement. "There appears to be no insurmountable difficulty in getting the committee decision through the entire Senate."

Don Vieth, the Energy Department official who directs Yucca Mountain research, was in Washington and unavailable for comment.

Dave Miller, an Energy Department spokesman in Las Vegas, said it was not the agency's policy to comment on political matters.

"The political aspects of it are not our bag," Miller said.

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Senate panel votes for DOE site selection funding cuts

Nevada wins round in nuke dump bout

By CHRIS CHRYSTAL
United Press International

WASHINGTON — The Senate Appropriations Committee voted Wednesday to eliminate Energy Department funding, a move that could result in a halt to evaluation of three sites considered for the nation's first high-level nuclear waste dump.

The panel, at the urging of Sen. Paul Laxalt, R-Nev., agreed to trim the agency's fiscal 1987 appro-

priations from \$619.3 million to \$390 million, which could halt work to determine which is the preferred site to bury the nation's most radioactive garbage.

The measure goes to the full Senate, where Laxalt predicted it would pass.

"This is a major victory for the state of Nevada and other targeted states," Laxalt said. "I commend the Appropriations Committee for recognizing the

flaws in the current process and putting the brakes on any further studies."

Nevada Republican representatives rallied in support of Laxalt and the committee's action, and Gov. Richard Bryan said any delay will work in Nevada's favor.

Laxalt accepted an offer from Rep. Harry Reid to lobby Democratic senators, starting with Sen. Bennett Johnston of Louisiana.

"It's not everything that I wanted, but it certainly is a compromise," Reid said. "It cuts a big chunk out of the money they wanted."

Reid said he expected a compromise in a House-Senate conference to resolve differences in the two bills that would split the difference.

Rep. Barbara Vucanovich, R-Nev., said the com-

(See DOE, Page 6A)

DOE fund cut could halt nuke dump search

(Continued from Page 1A)

mittee vote indicates Congress is more disillusioned with the DOE's high-level waste program.

"This strong vote of no confidence in the Senate will force the Department of Energy to go back to the drawing board and Congress to take this issue up next January, when the 100th Congress convenes," she said.

Bryan said he would like to see Laxalt go one step further and say he opposes location of the high-level dump in Nevada.

"The vote gives us time to strengthen our legal case," he said of the lawsuit that was filed against the DOE the same day President Reagan announced Yucca Mountain was one of three selected sites. "It will make Congress more aware of what went into the DOE's site selection process."

Jim Santini, Reid's opponent in the U.S. Senate race, also praised the committee action, and took a swipe at Reid's drive to present a petition signed by Nevadans against the dump.

"The tough, effective way to attack locating a nuclear waste dump in Nevada is through national legislation — just as Sen. Laxalt has done," Santini said, adding he hopes Reid will influence getting the cut through the House.

State GOP Chairman Bob Cashell accused Reid and Bryan of grandstanding the nuclear issue, and said Laxalt's work shows a Republican commitment to Nevada's interests.

An Energy Department spokeswoman said the loss of funds is "a tremendous and unfortunate setback that will have a serious impact on our program and site characterization activities."

Specific effects of the funding cut, if sustained by the full Senate and a House-Senate conference, won't be known until officials have studied details of the legislation, the spokeswoman said.

Energy Secretary John Herrington, who learned of Laxalt's plan shortly before the committee meeting, dashed off a letter to Chairman Mark Hatfield, R-Ore.,

warning that, "To reduce funding at this crucial juncture will undermine our ability to begin geologic waste disposal by 1998 as required by the Nuclear Waste Policy Act and by contracts with each of America's nuclear utilities."

"To stop or delay characterization activities at this time is to turn away from the national commitment represented by the NWPA," he said.

President Reagan announced May 28 that the top three candidate sites for the nuclear repository are Yucca Mountain, Hanford, Wash., and Deaf Smith, Texas. Final selection is to be made in 1991.

The repository, whose cost has been estimated up to \$100 billion, is supposed to safely store radioactive garbage in underground vaults for 400 generations, or 10,000 years.