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National Wildlife Federation • Natural Resources Defense Council •  
Physicians for Social Responsibility • Public Interest Research Group •  
Scenic America • Sierra Club • The Wilderness Society**

March 26, 2002

United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator,

In the near future you will be considering an issue of highest priority to the environmental community – the potential selection of the Yucca Mountain, Nevada site as a permanent repository for high-level nuclear waste. This issue is one of the handful of issues selected as top priorities by the major national environmental, consumer and safe energy organizations because the potential harm to human health and the environment from an ill-considered decision is so great.

The Secretary of Energy has recommended, and the President approved, Yucca Mountain as a suitable site for permanent geologic storage for the most dangerous, long-lived radioactive material in existence. This recommendation was made despite the fact that the congressionally-designated independent Nuclear Waste Technical Review Board has stated that “the technical basis for the DOE’s repository performance estimates is weak to moderate,” citing the many important scientific questions about the safety of the site that remain unresolved.

According to the General Accounting Office there are more than 293 significant unresolved technical issues with the Yucca Mountain site, including: the length of time the containers will remain intact, the amount and speed of water flowing through the waste area, and the likelihood of volcanic activity. Thus, the Yucca Mountain finding reneged on a promise President Bush made to the people of Nevada during the 2000 presidential campaign that no waste would come to Nevada unless the decision was based on “sound science.”

DOE’s finding also fails to address the issue of transportation of this extremely dangerous material, despite the fact that tens of thousands of shipments of radioactive waste will be transported through 44 states and the District of Columbia on trains, trucks, and barges potentially exposing millions of people along the routes to radiation.

Under existing law the State of Nevada is now considering whether it will object to this presidential finding, and is virtually certain to do so. Following that objection the issue will be in the hands of the Congress, which has 90 legislative days to consider whether to overturn Nevada’s decision.

The environmental community stands as one in urging you in the strongest possible terms to reject a rush to judgment on an issue of such vital importance to the health and safety of the entire US population. The independent scientific community and the General Accounting Office have determined that there are many unanswered questions about Yucca Mountain. These issues must be resolved and a plan developed to ensure that waste is transported safely and securely before any waste is moved to a permanent repository. We urge the congress to vote to reject DOE's premature and technically unfounded recommendation in favor of the Yucca Mountain site.

Sincerely,

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