

Opinion/Editorial (716 words)

July 8, 2002

Re: Impending U.S. Senate Vote on Yucca Mountain, Nevada Nuclear Waste Dump

The environmental movement of Michigan stands united in its opposition to the proposed Yucca Mountain, Nevada nuclear waste dump, and thus in its thanks to the Honorable Debbie Stabenow for her clear-headed, pro-environment decision to vote against the ill-conceived proposal, a 20-years-in-the-making vote likely to take place in coming days in the U.S. Senate.

The Yucca Mountain plan would: not get the nuclear waste out of Michigan; waste an additional \$50 billion of ratepayer and taxpayer money on a geologically unsuitable site, money that should be re-directed to finding real answers to the nuclear waste problem; worsen an already corrupted process; expose the vast majority of Michigan residents to the risks of nuclear waste transportation (severe accidents like the Pottersville propane train derailment in May, and "dirty bomb" terrorist attacks); go against the united opposition of the environmental community in Michigan and across the country.

The Washington, D.C.-based U.S. Chamber of Commerce, acting on behalf and at the behest of the nuclear power industry, has been running radio ads attacking Senator Stabenow for her wise decision to protect the environment and the public. The ads claim that "out of state special interest groups want to leave the nuclear waste here in Michigan, where it doesn't belong." Actually, many of our Michigan-based, grassroots organizations have worked hard for many years, even decades, to protect the Great Lakes environment and the people of Michigan from the dangerous radioactive wastes generated by the nuclear utilities along our shorelines. We continue to do so, and that's why we oppose the nuclear power industry-driven Yucca Mountain plan. Recently, the Michigan Environmental Council, the state-wide coalition representing 56 grassroots organizations, passed a resolution opposed to the Yucca dump. An additional 25 Michigan grassroots groups have also expressed opposition to Yucca.

The nuclear industry has reportedly spent \$72 million (in the form of campaign contributions to elected officials, lobbying, and paid advertising campaigns like these radio ads) over the past decade to promote the Yucca Mountain dump. That represents the combined budgets of our non-profit, grassroots organizations for decades. Such undue industry influence and deceptive ads have corrupted the Yucca Mountain decision-making process beyond repair. For example, Detroit Edison and Consumers Energy have conducted an "astro-turf" campaign (as opposed to grassroots democracy) to persuade a number of Michigan counties to pass, verbatim, industry-written pro-Yucca resolutions, using "fact" sheets filled with false information. Concerned citizens had no knowledge of the campaign, let alone involvement in the decisions, until the media announced the passage of the resolutions. If that is democracy, then it is "the best democracy money can buy". We urge Senator Levin, who has worked long and hard to fight undue big-money influence in Washington, to see that the nuclear power industry is one of the worst when it comes to influence peddling and campaign finance corruption.

Martin Luther King, Jr. was fond of saying that "a lie cannot live forever." The deceptions that pro-Yucca Mountain forces have used to push their agenda forward will one day be understood by large numbers of Michiganders and Americans. This would inevitably happen if this dangerous plan goes forward and decades from now, large quantities of high-level radioactive waste are still piling up on the shorelines of the Great Lakes, even after many tens of thousands of risky truck, train, and barge shipments have rolled through communities in 45 states and filled the Yucca Mountain dump to capacity.

Having just celebrated Independence Day, we call upon the U.S. Senate to -- in Thomas Jefferson's prophetic words -- "curb the excesses of the monied interests," to put public safety and the environment ahead of the short-term economic interests of the nuclear power industry. Senators should reflect upon Jefferson's words to George Washington that "Delay is preferable to error," as they cast a vote that will have consequences extending out centuries and many thousands of years into the future, for nuclear waste remains deadly for that long.

Yucca Mountain is the illusion of a solution. We thank Senator Stabenow for seeing through the deceptions, and for protecting public health, safety and the environment by voting no on Yucca. We urge Senator Levin to join her and a growing number of U.S. Senators who, in light of new information, have reconsidered their past position and declared their opposition to Yucca.

Sincerely,

Kevin Kamps

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