

Reno Gazette Journal

Nevada, keep up the fight against nuclear waste: RGJ Editorial Board

March 01, 2018

Posted at: <http://www.rgj.com/story/opinion/editorials/2018/03/01/nevada-keep-up-fight-against-nuclear-waste-rgj-editorial-board/387365002/>

After a seven-year respite, it appears that the federal government wants to take another crack at opening the Yucca Mountain Nuclear Waste Repository in southern Nevada, a project that state leaders have opposed since it was first pitched in the early 1980s.

The RGJ Editorial Board urges its state leaders and congressional representatives to keep the fight going – because once again, Nevada is being kept on the sidelines of the discussion.

In 2011, federal funding for the site was cut off by the Obama administration. The government at the time noted that shutting down work at Yucca was a political decision and not based on safety concerns. (Of course, this is the same federal government that assured 20th-century Nevada that nuclear testing posed no health problems.) But the Department of Energy and Nuclear Regulatory Commission has blindsided the state by asking for \$150 million this year to pursue licensing for the shuttered facility.

At first glance, Nevada looks to be outnumbered in this fight. Spent fuel has been piling up for decades at 61 nuclear power plants around the country, and about one in three Americans live within 50 miles of a nuclear plant, according to 2010 census data.

But Nevada has kept up the fight for decades with a united front of Republicans, Democrats, business interests and environmental activists. We likely can continue to cost the federal government more time and billions without coming any closer to storing an ounce of spent fuel in the Silver State. And somehow, the federal government still doesn't see Nevada as an equal partner for negotiation, but rather a bullying victim to be strong-armed.

If we ever get invited to the adult table, we Nevadans need to be educated on the science and risks of storing and reprocessing spent nuclear fuel here, rather than relying on the same rote "no" to which we've been accustomed for decades. An online poll conducted by the RGJ last month, though highly unscientific, showed a plurality of respondents still eager to prevent Yucca from being certified, but other respondents thought a case could be made for the repository. Some wanted to know more about the direct economic impact for the state from storing and reprocessing spent nuclear fuel. Others wanted billions (or even trillions) of dollars from the feds to fund education, transportation and health care for Nevadans.

At this point, though, we're just writing wish lists; we're not hearing these proposals from the other side of a negotiating table. But again, we're not viewed as a party to the discussion. We have no offers – and we shouldn't be the ones to start proposing any. Despite the billions of dollars sunk into the project, the federal government hasn't even attempted to sweeten the deal. It appears that after three-plus decades, nuclear-powered states and the federal government still views Nevada as the place to sweep nuclear waste under the rug.

The RGJ Editorial Board recommends that state leaders keep up the fight to be included in the conversation, and not to be coerced into taking responsibility for other states' energy choices. Nevada is not America's wasteland, nor is it America's weak sibling.