

## Churchill County Nuclear Waste Oversight Program

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### In The News

- WASHINGTON -- When Congress targeted Nevada as the nation's nuclear waste dumping ground, the state didn't have the political power to say no. Twenty years later, the most ardent foe of the Yucca Mountain nuclear waste dump is about to become Senate majority leader. Nevada Democratic Sen. Harry Reid.
- WASHINGTON -Sen. Pete Domenici, R-N.M., is still planning to advance a bill next year that would aid the federal government's plan to store nuclear waste at Yucca Mountain in Nevada. Despite the upcoming change in chairmanship of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, Domenici said he remains committed to the Yucca Mountain-related legislation he introduced in September and that he plans to reintroduce the proposal next year.

## Yucca Rail Line Divides Towns

Ninety percent of homeowners interviewed last week in Silver Springs oppose the proposal to haul nuclear waste to Yucca Mountain through their inexpensive but rapidly growing community.

They've found peace and quiet in Silver Springs' wide-open spaces. They knew trains have occasionally carried bombs past their homes to the Army Ammunition Depot at Hawthorne since the 1930s.

But they were not aware that the DOE is looking at using the same tracks to carry waste to Yucca Mountain, 100 miles northwest of Las Vegas, from commercial nuclear power plants across the country.

June Mick fled to this rural Lyon County community six months ago to get away from the crime and high costs of south Florida.

She and her husband paid \$230,000 for a manufactured home and 4.7 acres of jackrabbits and sagebrush near an infrequently used railroad track about 40 miles east of Carson City. Only last week did Mick learn the track in her backyard is under study as the rail line on which Department of Energy trains would carry high-level nuclear waste to Yucca Mountain.

"I don't want that stuff," she said. "What if there is an accident? There is no telling what could happen."

Her thoughts are shared by neighbors a few blocks away. Retired Navy veteran Robert Brittain moved to his track-side Silver Springs home last year.



Photo credit—oldboy.com

Ruth Curtis purchased her mobile home beside the track 16 years ago.

"I'm pro-military. But I don't care for Yucca Mountain. Ammunition is different. It's for national security," Brittain said.

"Nuclear waste?" Curtis questioned, then answered herself: "Oh, no."

State laws require county planning departments to notify homeowners when new developments are planned in their neighborhoods, but the federal government isn't obliged to notify people when it wants to haul radioactive waste through their

backyards.

The DOE placed advertisements in the Fallon newspaper about a hearing at which residents could discuss the railroad plan, but in Silver Springs, news travels largely by word of mouth.

Whether hauling 77,000 tons of radioactive waste within a few yards of Silver Springs' bedrooms poses any danger depends on whom you ask.

Bob Loux, the executive director for the state Agency for Nuclear Projects, said a terrorist with a shoulder-held, anti-tank missile launcher could put a hole in a cask containing nuclear waste.

"If 1 percent of the cargo escaped, it would contaminate a 42 square-mile area and take a couple of decades and \$8 billion to \$10 billion to clean up," Loux said. "DOE maps have shown up on terrorist Web sites, we are told by the FBI."

It is not just Silver Springs residents who have reason for concern, he added. Trains from power plants will move along the main Union Pacific line paralleling Interstate 80 from the east and west. Nuclear waste would be hauled through downtown Reno.

The nuclear trains would veer off the Union Pacific line north of Fallon and head more than 300 miles south to Yucca Mountain along a route near U.S. Highway 95 that goes through Silver

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## Yucca Rail Line Divides Towns (continued)

This newsletter is a publication of the Churchill County Repository Planning and Oversight Program. Churchill County is one of ten affected units of local government (AULG) involved in the proposed Yucca Mountain Repository. Funding provided to Churchill County is paid by users of electricity generated by nuclear power plants, under a general contract with nuclear generating utilities. The federal government collects a fee of one mill (one-tenth of a cent) per kilowatt-hour from utility companies for nuclear generated electricity. The money goes into the Nuclear Waste fund which is used to fund all program related activities.

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Springs and close to the rural communities of Schurz, Hawthorne, Mina, Tonopah and Goldfield.

Costs of constructing this "Mina Corridor" route, including laying 209 miles of track from Hawthorne to Yucca Mountain, have been estimated at more than \$1 billion.

Allen Benson, director of external affairs for the DOE's Office of Civilian Radioactive Waste Management, does not share Loux's alarm.

He noted the federal government has been hauling nuclear waste by truck for 50 years with no problems, including making more than 4,000 shipments to the Waste Isolation Pilot Project in New Mexico.

"The safety record is quite remarkable," Benson said. "I am not aware of any release harmful to the public. We are quite confident."

Benson noted the waste going to Yucca Mountain would be in solid, not liquid, form. If a cask were penetrated, some pellets might fall onto the ground, but a hazardous materials team would be sent out "to clean it up and move on," he said.

Security officers will accompany the trains, according to Benson, and the DOE "is not going to advertise" when shipments will be moved to Yucca Mountain. He anticipates about two trains a week will haul waste over a 24-year period.

"There is no such thing as a 100 percent safety guarantee," Benson said. "But this is definitely not Chernobyl. People have this fear of nuclear. We

understand that. But nuclear is medicine. Nuclear is electricity."

The public reaction to the word nuclear is far different further south in economically depressed rural Nevada. Of 25 people interviewed last week in Goldfield, Hawthorne, Tonopah, Schurz and Mina, 22 expressed support for the DOE's new rail line.

Hawthorne businessman Rex Mills epitomized their views during a hearing in Hawthorne. He said rural Nevadans want the DOE to share its Yucca Mountain track with commercial trains.

"If they put the railroad here, it will be great," Mills said. "It will give an incentive for companies nationwide to move into a lower-taxed area. The waste is going into Yucca Mountain, whether we like it or not."

So far the DOE has spent \$9 billion on the project. Costs could top \$58 billion, based on an estimate made in 2001.

On a windy morning in November, Postmistress Theora Janis and resident Dollie Murillo stood in front of the Mina Post Office and discussed the desperate need for an economic revival in their community.

The town's population has dropped to about 100 people, most of them senior citizens. Many homes and businesses are abandoned. The elementary school was closed five years ago. The train tracks were pulled out 10 years ago.

"They already carry (hazardous) waste through here by trucks," Janis said. "We need jobs. A railroad would help us."

Whether the DOE allows private business to share its Yucca Mountain line has not been determined.

"The rail line could be open to commercial use, but that is a decision that remains to be made," Benson said.

Bob Halstead, a transportation consultant for the Agency for Nuclear Projects, said the DOE has been trying to win favor for the new rail line by suggesting to community leaders that the line will be shared with commercial trains.

Loux doubts a new rail line would provide any upside to rural Nevada. About the only benefit would be selling lunches or dinners to workers building the line, he said.

"They had a rail line to Mina for 50 years and it didn't do anything for them," Loux said. "Every rail line there in the past has been torn out."

The only reason the DOE can contemplate construction of the Mina route is because of a change in thinking by the Walker Lake Paiute Indian Tribe, Loux said.

The tribal council in 1991 had rejected a move by the DOE to study moving waste through the reservation by rail. But last April, council members agreed to let the government study the issue.

Ammunition bound for the Hawthorne depot now is carried by rail past tribal headquarters, homes and a school in the town of Schurz. Under the DOE study plan, the rail line would be relocated about four miles outside of town.

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# Yucca Rail Line Divides Towns (continued)

(Continued from page 2)

Chairwoman Genia Williams refused to answer questions about the change in position when visited by a reporter last week. Instead, she handed out a prepared statement saying the council opposes the new rail line unless the DOE addresses all safety issues and agrees to ban shipments of nuclear waste by truck on Highway 95.

"Historically our tribe has been a victim of federal government decisions," Williams said. "I do not like the idea of Nevada being a dumping ground for nuclear waste, but this may be a chance to make my tribal community safer from nuclear waste that may come through our community on a highway," she added.

Williams also refused to discuss whether the DOE has offered any financial incentives to win the tribe's support for the route. A source familiar with the tribe, however, said the DOE mentioned rewarding the tribe with \$100 million if it agreed to the rail plan.

Back in Silver Springs, Brittain walks beside the tracks and wonders if the hoopla about the nuclear trains is meaningless.

"I can't believe Harry Reid will let Yucca Mountain happen," he said.

Reid, D-Nev., said as the new Senate majority leader he controls what comes up on the Senate floor and he will continue his opposition to Yucca Mountain.

Loux figures the project is dead and the hearings to discuss a new rail line



through rural Nevada are something of a sham.

"All of this is a big morass that DOE can't get through," Loux said.

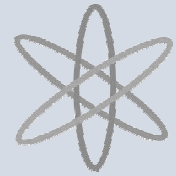
"There is no chance of federal legislation. Reid and company are in a position to move to zeroing out their budget and just shutting it down."

Benson recognized Reid's influence during a hearing in Goldfield.

But until federal law changes, he said his agency will continue on its objective to open a Yucca Mountain nuclear repository by 2017. That date, he added, can be met "assuming we can get the budgets we need" from

Congress.

"Creating Yucca Mountain as the repository is the law of the land," Benson said. "If Congress changes the law, we will follow it." *Source: Las Vegas Review Journal*



For more information contact Churchill County Nuclear Waste Oversight Program at 85 North Taylor Fallon NV 89406 (775) 428-1592 website address churchillcountynwop.com

Additional information on the repository program can be obtained from the U.S. Department of Energy Office of Civilian Radioactive Waste Management 1551 Hillshire Drive Las Vegas, NV 89134 1-800-225-6972 www.ocrwm.doe.gov

The Nevada Agency for Nuclear Project, Capital Complex, Carson City, Nevada 89570, (775) 687-3744 or www.state.nv.us/nucwaste

# World is Banking on a Nuclear Future

The world has moved to overwhelmingly embrace nuclear energy as the first response to high oil prices and climate change.

At the Group of 20 meeting of economic leaders in Melbourne, more countries edged closer to endorsing a tax on carbon emissions, including China, the world's second-largest polluter. Nuclear power was vigorously pushed by Japan, Russia, France, China and India - despite it not appearing on the formal agenda or final statement.

Russia's Finance Minister, Alexei Kudrin, told the Herald: "Many spoke about the need to develop the nuclear industry. Before this no one has raised this issue to such an extent."

Argentina's central bank chief, Martin Redrado, said: "There is a revisiting of nuclear energy all over the world."

Russia revealed plans to build two nuclear power plants every year until nuclear power accounted for 30 per cent of its energy production.

The Indian Finance Minister, Palaniappan Chidambaram, said Australia was out of step with several other G20 members on nuclear power - despite calls by the Prime Minister, John Howard, to debate the subject.

"France, Japan and India support increased dependence on nuclear power but Australia takes a very different view, presumably because public opinion here is against nuclear power," he said.

India again pushed its case that Australia should sell it uranium, despite India not having signed the non-proliferation treaty.

And the Chinese Finance Minister, Jin Renqing, pressed the Treasurer, Peter Costello, to



*Transport of 12 high radioactive containers with nuclear waste to Gorleben, Germany.*

Talk was dominated by energy security. Officials at the meeting said it had established free and transparent energy markets as the dominant industry paradigm - despite implicit challenges to OPEC oil producers, Chinese energy purchasing agreements and Russia's dominating gas industry.

Mr Kudrin rejected a recent NATO report that Russia was considering an OPEC-style cartel for gas.

"Russia is not considering establishing such a cartel," he said. *Source: Sydney Morning Herald*

## About G-20

The Group of Twenty (G-20) Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors was established in 1999 to bring together systemically important industrialized and developing economies to discuss key issues in the global economy. The inaugural meeting of the G-20 took place in Berlin on 15–16 December 1999, hosted by the German and Canadian finance ministers.

follow through on investment agreements relating to Australia's vast uranium reserves. China has signed the non-proliferation treaty.

Mr Costello said the Federal Government would decide whether Australia had a nuclear future after it receives a feasibility report on the subject

Last night the world's top central bank and finance officials appeared unanimously pleased with discussions inside the forum, despite protesters causing logistical mayhem outside.



*G20 Protest: Human Barricade*



French President Jacques Chirac, right, with at his side European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso, left, shakes hand with US secretary of state for energy Raymond Orbach.

Fusion energy, created when light atomic nuclei are fused together at temperatures greater than those of the interior of stars and far above the melting point of any solid container, could provide significant amounts of electricity and also generate hydrogen that could power fuel cell vehicles of the future. Fusion power has the following advantages:

- Fusion is clean: It produces negligible atmospheric emissions and zero greenhouse gas emissions.
- Fusion is safe: Reactors cannot "melt down," and do not generate the high-level, long-lasting radioactive waste associated with nuclear fission.

Fusion is renewable: Commercial fusion reactors would use lithium and deuterium, both readily available natural resources.

## U.S. Signs International Fusion Energy Agreement

PARIS -- Physicists have dreamt about it for decades: harnessing the fusion process that powers the sun to make clean, safe and limitless energy. A multinational pact signed on November 21st may bring that dream a step closer to reality.

Seven partners representing half the world's population have agreed to build an experimental fusion reactor in southern France that could revolutionize global energy use for future generations.

Yet it is also just an experiment \_ a bold, long-awaited, \$12.8 billion experiment \_ and it will be decades before scientists are even sure it works.

The ITER project by the United States, the European Union, China, India, Russia, Japan and South Korea will attempt to combat global warming by offering an alternative to fossil fuels. Controlling climate change and finding new energy sources are urgent goals for a

growing global population.

"Worldwide demand for energy is expected to double in the next 25 years and we need to diversify our energy supply," said U.S. Secretary of Energy Samuel W. Bodman, during a tour Tuesday of Princeton University's Plasma Physics Lab.

Experiments on two reactors at the Princeton lab - one in use since 1999 and the other under construction - will be crucial in helping scientists determine how to translate research at the ITER facility into a design for commercial fusion reactors, Bodman said.

French President Jacques Chirac hailed Tuesday's agreement as a victory for humanity \_ and for France, which widely exports its nuclear energy expertise and beat out Japan in the bidding to host the reactor. The project's director will be Japanese, and Japan will

supply the reactor's most complex parts.

"The growing shortage of resources and the battle against global warming demand a revolution in our ways of production and consumption," Chirac said. "We have the duty to start research that will prepare energy solutions for our descendants."

Physicists have been trying for half a century to create fusion, which replicates the sun's power source, produces no greenhouse gases and generates relatively little radioactive waste.

The International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor project, or ITER, recognizes that no single country can afford the immense investment needed to move the science forward.

It is expected to take eight years to build the reactor in Cadarache in the southern region of Provence. A demonstration power plant may be

ready by 2040, according to project organizers. If the prototype proves viable, it could point the way to designs for commercial power plants.

Officials involved in the project say 10 percent to 20 percent of the world's energy could come from fusion by the end of the century.

Some experts, though, question whether the project can keep all the promises being made on its behalf.

"I would be extremely surprised \_ pleasantly surprised \_ if there was a prototype" by 2040, said Matthew Bunn, nuclear expert at Harvard University.

He said "it's an open question" whether the project is even pursuing the right technology. Still, he said Tuesday's signing was seen as a major boost to physicists worldwide - even if the ITER never leads to commercial

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## U.S. Signs Agreement (continued)



From left to right: Vladimir Travin (Deputy head of the Federal Atomic Energy Agency (Rosatom), Russian Federation), Takeshi Iwaya (Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs, Japan), Xu Guanhua (Minister of Science and Technology, People's Republic of China), José Manuel Barroso (President of the European Commission), Jacques Chirac (President of the French Republic), Kim Woo Sik (Vice Prime-Minister, Ministry of Science and Technology, Korea), Anil Kakodhar (Secretary to the Government of India, Department of Atomic Energy), Raymond Orbach (Under Secretary for Science, U.S. Department of Energy), and Janez Potocnik (European Commissioner for Science and Research).

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energy.

"This is big science at its biggest and will keep many people in the plasma physics community with lots of experiments to do for a long time to come," he said. The project is expected to create about 10,000 jobs.

Ivan Oelrich, vice president for strategic security for the Federation of American Scientists, said there is no guarantee the project will lead to designs for commercial reactors. He questioned whether it represented the best investment if the primary goal is to achieve energy independence.

"If you took this money and invested it on things

like more efficient insulation and windows and got people to drive smaller cars ... you would come out way ahead on your future energy security than you would by pursuing this right now," he said.

The European Union has agreed to provide about 45 percent of the 12.8 billion cost of building the reactor, which is expected to take about a decade. The other nations will each contribute 9.1 percent.

Bodman said only 20 percent of the United States' \$1.12 billion share will be paid in cash. The rest reflects the value of the equipment and labor to be provided by U.S. scientists and technicians.

The ITER project has

been on the drawing boards for years. It stalled amid concerns about financing and reactor design and, at one point, the United States withdrew, leaving scientists warning the U.S. would eventually have to buy the technology from other nations.

The United States never offered to host the project largely because that would require a much larger share of its cost.

The seven partners agreed last year to build the reactor at Cadarache, which houses one of the biggest civil nuclear research centers in Europe. The U.S. has given its final approval, though the other partners still must ratify it.

French anti-nuclear group Sortir du Nucleaire

warned the project will produce radioactive waste and will consume energy in its race to conserve it.

"If fusion one day manages to produce electricity, it will surely not be in acceptable economic, ecological and industrial conditions," it said.

*Source: AP-Washington Post*

# Guinn Wants Release of Documents



CARSON CITY -- A letter sent November 21st by Gov. Kenny Guinn calls for U.S. Department of Energy Secretary Samuel Bodman to release millions of important documents related to DOE's plans to store nuclear waste in Nevada.

Guinn strongly opposes DOE's plans to license and develop a high-level nuclear waste dump at Yucca Mountain, about 90 miles northwest of Las Vegas.

Calling DOE's continuing refusal to make critically important licensing documents available to the State "needlessly punitive," Guinn asserted that "there is no justification for withholding public access to these documents now when the task of reviewing them is so overwhelming later."

In the letter, Guinn refers to the fact that Edward Sproat, director of DOE's Office of Civilian Radioactive Management, has announced a June 30, 2008, date to submit a license Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) for construction of a high-level nuclear waste repository at Yucca Mountain.

As a prerequisite, the department must certify to the NRC that its licensing support network (LSN) electronic data base of

relevant licensing documents is complete and publicly accessible. This must be accomplished at least six months prior to DOE submitting an application, according to NRC's regulations. Sproat has scheduled the application for LSN certification of its documents for Dec. 21, 2007.

As stated in the letter, the purpose of the LSN is to make these millions of documents related to the Yucca Mountain Project available electronically to all interested parties, beginning before DOE applies for a license. DOE's first effort to certify its LSN, on June 30, 2004, was set aside as insufficient by the NRC.

The more than 1 million documents from DOE's original certification effort are currently publicly available on the LSN Web site maintained by the LSN Administrator. But since June 30, 2004, 2,123,265 additional documents have been turned over for processing. None of this information has been made public.

"And Mr. Sprout estimates that approximately 6.8 million more documents will be placed on the LSN at the time of certification," Guinn wrote. "We are deeply concerned that the 2 million-plus documents provided since 2004, and subsequently indexed by the LSN administrator, under instruction by the department, have not been made publicly available on the LSN, and that the balance of the 6.8 million documents that the department will

continue to provide to the LSN over the next 13 months will likewise not be made publicly available."

Guinn noted that while the NRC's regulations appear to permit this, "The regulation's authors and those commenting during the rule-making did not contemplate a six-year gap between the secretary's 2002 site recommendation and congressional designation of the Yucca Mountain potential repository site, and the department's submission of a license application."

The Nuclear Waste Policy Act calls for the license application to be made six months after congressional site designation. This did not occur, according to the governor.

"Thus, we have faced a period of many years in which a large part of the department's repository plans at Yucca Mountain remain a mystery," Guinn said.

DOE's design and operational approach have changed significantly since the site was recommended in 2002, according to the letter. To date, DOE has released only very limited information on these changes developed over these past three and a half years.

The letter goes on to say that "the information is critical to advance public understanding" of the repository and that the LSN administrator, "literally with the flip of a switch, could make these additional 2 million-plus documents publicly available."

The state has also been

objecting for years to DOE's continued "embargo" of documents Nevada needs to review before DOE applies for a license to build the proposed dump, said Bob Loux, executive director of Nevada's Agency for Nuclear Projects.

"DOE continues to hide this important information from Nevada," Loux said. "As Gov. Guinn said today, these documents need to be made public as soon as possible to give Nevadans, and all Americans, time to review this massive amount of material. Withholding the material serves no purpose other than intentionally impeding Nevada's ability to prepare for a licensing proceeding."

Guinn urged Bodman to lift the "embargo" on this information so it can be made public on the LSN Web site.

To show good faith, the state has already placed all of its documents on the LSN site and will continue to make new documents available to the public on an ongoing basis. *Source: Pahrump Valley Times*

## DOE Seeks Land for Yucca Mountain Railroad Studies

LAS VEGAS (AP) - The Department of Energy wants access to 208,000 acres of public land for studies of two possible rail routes to the proposed nuclear waste dump at Yucca Mountain.

DOE officials have filed an application with the Bureau of Land Management to withdraw 139,391 acres of land in a mile-wide corridor running 130 miles from Hawthorne to Goldfield, the so-called Mina route.



It also has asked permission to withdraw an additional 68,646 acres of public land along portions of the Caliente route, BLM spokesman Doran Sanchez said Monday.

The land withdrawals would allow the department to move forward with environmental studies of the rail routes to the proposed nuclear repository 90 miles northwest of Las Vegas.

The Mina corridor has gained favor among some government officials as possibly a less expensive and less complicated than a \$2 billion rail line that would run from Caliente in eastern Nevada.

But critics say the Mina corridor could expose more communities, includ-

ing downtown Reno, to nuclear waste shipments.

Sanchez said Interior Department officials in Washington were reviewing the DOE application for the two land transactions, which was filed on Oct. 17 and seeks reserved use status of the land until Dec. 27, 2015.

The withdrawals would prevent any new mining claims to be filed, and forbid the government from selling or trading any of the land, Sanchez said. Grazing and other public

access would not be restricted, he said.

But one Yucca Mountain critic said the latest application coupled with earlier land withdrawals means DOE is reserving use of more than 500,000 acres of government-managed property in the state for railroad studies.

"You have guys tying up as much as half a million acres of public land in Nevada for them to make their minds up what they want to do," said Bob Loux, executive director of the Nevada Agency for Nuclear Projects.

A public hearing on the application will be held but has not yet been scheduled, Sanchez said.

*Source: Las Vegas Sun*

## Reid's Rise to Power May be Bad News for Yucca Backers

When pro-Yucca Mountain advocates called on Senate Majority Leader-elect Harry Reid to step aside from the nuclear waste debate, some saw it as an act of desperation over the stalled project.

After the Democrats' victory in last month's elections, efforts to build the nation's first nuclear waste repository seem to be at a crossroads.

Reid's new position all but halts legislative efforts to "fix Yucca" and seriously jeopardizes its continued funding. The looming presidential race, with its early Democratic caucus in Nevada, means contenders likely will have little appetite to support a project unpopular with Silver State voters. Plans for establishing interim waste storage elsewhere continue to be floated as options.

And the Department of Energy faces a 2008 deadline to present the project for approval - a milestone that has been blown twice before.

The day after Democrats took control of Congress in last month's midterm elections, Reid told Nevada reporters that his new position did not mean he could single-handedly kill Yucca Mountain.

Plenty of Reid's fellow Democrats backed the original plan to send waste to Nevada and continue to support it. But as leader, Reid can decide what bills come to the Senate floor, and he could have a heavy hand in slashing Yucca Mountain's annual \$450 million budget, essentially starving the project of the money it needs to progress.

Reid has long called for storing the waste where it is

now, at dozens of nuclear power sites around the nation.

His impending power as Senate majority leader prompted leaders of a pro-Yucca Mountain coalition last week to call on Reid to step aside, arguing that he should not abuse his leadership position for parochial interests.

While the pro-Yucca coalition doubts Reid will try to eliminate funding for Yucca - the government sends \$300 million to Nevada each year for the project, funding 1,400 jobs - it expects that he will simply try to starve it to dissolution.

Because of Reid's ascension and other factors, Nevada's clout is much enhanced.

The government has spent \$9 billion on Yucca Mountain, and costs could rise well above the projected \$58 billion price tag.

Still, the nuclear industry remains confident that as the new Democratic Congress tackles the global warming issue, Yucca Mountain will remain on track.

Some environmentalists believe nuclear power is a key component of the climate change debate because it is a cleaner energy source. And if you go nuclear, you need a place to store the waste.

With as many as 30 new applications expected to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission next year, some believe nuclear energy is poised for a renaissance.

But after President Bush leaves office at the end of 2008, it is unclear whether a new administration would continue the push for a new nuclear era. *Source: Las Vegas Sun*