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PRESIDENT
Nevada State Senate

CHAIR
Nevada Commission on
Economic Development

CHAIR
Nevada Commission on
Tourism

VICE CHAIR
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OFFICE OF THE LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

LORRAINE T. HUNT

RECEIVED

OCT 14 2001

October 1, 2001

U.S. Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham
U.S. Department of Energy
1000 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20585

Dear Mr. Secretary:

As President of the Nevada State Senate, I am responding to your request for comments from the Nevada State Legislature. The issue is your pending decision whether or not to recommend to the President that Yucca Mountain be developed as a repository for high-level radioactive waste.

I am writing to bring your attention to an issue of tremendous importance to my home state of Nevada, the nation, and the world. The issue is the transportation of nuclear waste and the potentially hazardous effects it would have on the citizens in Nevada and across the country. The risk of transportation accidents and radiation exposure from an accident is very real and would create a catastrophe beyond our comprehension. Clark County is ranked as the fastest growing county in the nation, the growth has led to increasing congestion along the transportation routes being considered. This is turn increases the likelihood of an accident.

While it is true this is a critical decision with serious consequences, there is no reason to centralize interim storage of high-level nuclear waste in Nevada. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission has concluded that irradiated fuel can safely remain at the reactors for up to 100 years. To move 95 percent of the nation's waste through our hometowns in casks that are governed by inadequate standards is not only irresponsible, but also negligent, particularly in light of the new threat of homeland terrorism and the many uncertainties this new danger poses.

Transporting the waste poses special health concerns because of its intense radioactivity. According to the Clark County Nuclear Waste Project Office, the canisters that hold the waste cannot prevent a small amount of radiation from escaping. While transportation routes have not been selected yet, it is estimated that 43 states encompassing hundreds of small communities and major cities across the country will be at risk.

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A major task of state and local government is to prepare for possible emergencies and to assist in ensuring that the public and the economy are protected from any adverse affects of nuclear waste transportation and storage. An estimated $276 million is needed by public safety agencies in order to be adequately prepared for the worst-case scenario. Moreover, the affects of transporting nuclear waste through our American communities are unknown. What will the affects be – on our economy, on property values, and most important of all, on the health and safety of our citizens?

Tourism constitutes Nevada's economic lifeblood. As such, the Nevada Resort Association passed a resolution in opposition to the proposed repository. The resolution states in part that "any diminution in the image that Nevada now conveys"…"would reduce tourism and severely damage the welfare of Nevada's citizens." This indicates very serious risk from the stigma of an accident involving the shipment of high-level waste.

Currently, 15,000 people have lost their jobs in Las Vegas as a consequence of the tourism downturn nationwide resulting from the devastating attack on New York City last month. This very real situation clearly indicates our state's dependence on tourism.

Because many very serious questions have yet to be answered, I urge you to move forward with great caution and not to recommend Yucca Mountain as a viable storage site for high-level nuclear waste.

Sincerely,

Lorraine T. Hunt

LORRAINE T. HUNT
Lieutenant Governor