HARRY REID
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United States Senate

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September 6, 2001

The Honorable George W. Bush
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Bush:

I am writing to express my profound concern and sincere disappointment with the ongoing Yucca Mountain site suitability recommendation process being conducted by your Department of Energy (DOE). As you know, Yucca Mountain, Nevada is being considered for development as a spent nuclear fuel and high-level nuclear waste geologic repository. What you may not know are the disturbing details of how the DOE is manipulating the process in contravention of sound science and sound public policy.

Last year, you pledged to base any Yucca Mountain decision on sound science and to work with state and local governments to address concerns about safety and transportation issues. I believe Nevadans viewed this commitment as a promise to have greater consideration of the views of the state in making this controversial decision. The public hearing held last night in North Las Vegas, Nevada, which is the first public hearing on the possible site recommendation for Yucca Mountain, was largely a missed opportunity to achieve that goal.

The hearing last night was a poor attempt to gauge public sentiment in Nevada regarding the proposed Yucca Mountain repository. I am particularly troubled by numerous complaints I have received about the hearing. First, I understand that the relatively inaccessible location of the site at the Department of Energy's office in North Las Vegas prevented many Nevadans from attending. Second, the public had to run a gauntlet of fences and guards just to get into the hearing and the facility was too small for the number of people who wanted to participate. Finally, many potential participants were unable to remain for the duration of the seven and one-half hour hearing due to child care and other family responsibilities and were therefore denied their opportunity to comment on the plan in person.

I respectfully request that you direct the Honorable Spencer Abraham, Secretary of Energy, to attend all future public hearings in Nevada so that he can personally interact with the citizens of Nevada and in turn share their concerns with you. While I have great respect for Secretary Abraham, I voted against his nomination to this important position, in part, because of his vocal support for any and all efforts to dispose of nuclear waste in Nevada during his tenure

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in the Senate. The final decision on Yucca Mountain affects the health and safety of every Nevadan and is too consequential to be made with any bias. I am confident that the Secretary's presence at these hearings will provide him with a better understanding of this issue.

Unfortunately, Secretary Abraham was not present to witness the heartfelt testimony of those who overcame significant logistical obstacles, some of which are recounted above. The Nuclear Waste Policy Act of 1982 (NWPA) explicitly requires DOE to hold public meetings in Nevada to hear from Nevadans. The Secretary's personal attendance is important to Nevadans and seems reasonable given the magnitude of the DOE's proposal and the intense opposition in our state. Failure to honor the spirit of the NWPA further undermines the credibility of the DOE and its biased characterization of the proposed repository.

It is important to remember that the purpose of this hearing was to hear public comment on a series of documents consisting of tens of thousands of written pages that DOE has been working on for nearly two decades. This is a daunting challenge for even the most sophisticated citizen and I hope that you will ensure that all citizens have appropriate time to participate in the public review. The citizens of Nevada have not had the time or opportunity for a full and fair hearing of their concerns on this most important decision, which threatens the health, safety and quality of life of all Nevadans.

Thank you for your attention to this very important matter, I look forward to your timely response to this request.

Sincerely,

Harry Reid

HARRY REID
United States Senator

cc: Secretary Spencer Abraham

HR:jh