

Pahrump, NV

RECEIVED

OCT 12 2001

Speech to DOE - 9/24/01

10/12/01

Good afternoon, I'm Mary Wilson, Vice-Chair of the Pahrump Town Board and while I'm speaking to you as a member of that board, I'm not necessarily speaking for the other members. I'm also the liaison to the Pahrump Nuclear Waste and Environmental Advisory Board, which is made up of scientists with over 100 combined years of experience in the nuclear field, including a nuclear engineer, nuclear physicist, nuclear health physicist, as well as two experts in environmental issues. I'd like to thank the Department of Energy for this opportunity to voice our opinions.

I've brought these concerns to DOE's attention before, but I feel that it's worth a second attempt. Maybe this time we will get more action. In the past, I have asked DOE and its contractors to not be blinded by the lights of Las Vegas. Unfortunately, I have not yet seen any real improvement in their basic economic policy. Yucca Mountain, as well as the Nevada Test Site, is located in Nye County. It is the communities of Nye County that will have to assume the liabilities, if Yucca Mtn. is selected. Yet it is Las Vegas that reaps an overwhelming majority of the financial benefits. Pahrump, Amargosa Valley, Beatty, Tonopah, Goldfield and Mercury - they are all much more affected by Yucca Mtn. than is Las Vegas. And they are the ones that will suffer in the event of a disaster at Yucca Mtn. There has already been a serious impact on Nye County and its communities on the economic front. A year and a half ago, I was assured by DOE officials, that Nye County communities would be given consideration in the form of support contracts. However, there has been little or no progress on this front. We don't expect to be given every contract, but we can offer a number of services through our local businesses. Instead, they're contracted out to Las Vegas and usually at a higher price than they would have paid locally. For example, DOE bought a large number of tires from a dealer in Las Vegas, yet Pahrump has the

same outlet right here. Why can't DOE use our local outlet and save all those transportation costs? This is not a fiscally responsible use of taxpayer monies. If we are unable to provide a service, then it makes sense to go farther afield. But we can fulfill the contracts just as efficiently as Las Vegas, and at a much more economical cost.

I would also ask DOE to revisit its policy of dealing only with state or county governments. The people live in the individual communities within those entities. While DOE compensates the state and counties, often that compensation does not reach the affected communities to the degree that it should. For example, DOE should negotiate directly with the individual communities for the PETT funds. That way DOE can be assured that affected communities are receiving the funds intended for them. So once again, I urge you to work with the communities in Nye County. Please, stop overlooking us, simply because we don't have the influential people, money or power to get the political attention we deserve.

Another issue that the Pahrump Nuke Board has commented on in the past was addressed in their response to the EIS. Their conclusion, which was adopted by the Pahrump Town Board, was that much more work needed to be done on the water study. There is a need for an ongoing study of water migration and a permanent sampling and monitoring program, with a commitment to mitigate any problem and ensure that no member of the public is ever at risk. DOE is still too far away from tangible results in this area to warrant any intelligent conclusion. Any danger to the water table affects Amargosa Valley and this needs to be addressed to protect those residents.

Another area of concern is that of cask testing. Yes, DOE has impressed us with how much these casks can withstand, but they have failed to test these casks to the breaking point. It's not enough to say the casks can stand up to this or that. DOE must assure people that they have done their job thoroughly, by finding out just

what that limit really is. And using the excuse that they have tested according to logical scenarios is unacceptable. Events on Sept. 11th proved once and for all that we don't live in a logical world. Please test these casks to failure.

In line with that, the public must also be assured that the transportation of all hazardous materials, including nuclear waste, is protected from any type of terrorist attack. This includes assuring us that the drivers have been through a thorough background check and have no ties that could put the public at risk.

As to using Yucca Mtn. as a permanent storage facility: I believe DOE is missing the point on this as well. The political brouhaha has caused many of our politicians to draw lines in the sand, either pro or con. While those against this project hold views that are commendable, they're hardly practical at this point in time. The billions of dollars already spent and the lack of studying any other site certainly points to Yucca Mtn. as the probable choice. How else would DOE answer to the taxpayers if they left: "Oh, gosh, well we thought it was a good idea - sorry we spent billions of dollars for nothing." I don't believe that DOE will leave or that they can even afford to leave at this point. But rather than this big battle of pro and con, which often resembles just so much political posturing, why don't we again look to the practical? Personally, I don't want this next door to me, but if it's going to be forced on me, then I want a say in what happens and I want compensation for risks imposed on me, whether those risks are enormous or minuscule. And I want DOE to stop putting all of their eggs in the permanent storage basket. The scientists on the Pahrump Nuke Board believe that this facility could be used as a temporary storage facility. As time and technology advances, we believe that methods of recycling and transmutation will emerge, probably sooner rather than later. We already have some methods. The trick is to make these methods cost effective. To that end, more effort needs to be expended in research and development of recycling and

transmutation and the recovery of valuable isotopes. Locking this waste away forever is as much a waste of potential assets as it is a ridiculous and probably impossible task. I urge DOE to look more closely at this and recommend UNLV as the logical leader for this study. We ask that the emphasis on permanent storage, as a first priority, be replaced with the study of making this waste safe and reusable. The second priority should be the construction of reprocessing and transmutation plants. Only as a third priority, should Yucca Mtn. be considered for permanent storage. If Nevada is going to be the storage place, then Nevada needs to be in charge of the nuclear waste. We also recommend that Nevada receive a minimum surcharge on nuclear waste brought into the state of \$10 per pound. The state of Nevada and DOE should fund UNLV, among others, to do the research and build an accelerator facility at the Nevada Test Site, utilizing reprocessed fuel. The motto of an environmentally conscious society should be "reduce, reuse, recycle".

We have made some of these suggestions before and DOE has made a start. But they need to invest much more in this area. Not only as a show of their good faith, but as a sign that the federal government can recognize when a strategy must change and is nimble enough to change that strategy quickly. Quickly means now - DOE has already been hearing about this for several years. They know recycling and transmutation is more prudent than permanent storage. So now is the time to show that they are actually listening.

Our first name is Pahrump. Our middle name is Nevada. And our last name is the United States of America. We are your mothers, fathers, sisters and brothers. We are a part of your family. And we deserve to be treated with respect. We deserve to have our concerns heard. And we deserve to be answered with more than lip service.

Thank you again for your time