

## MAYOR'S FORUM

# Yucca Mountain Proposal an Outrageous Risk

The possibility of terrorism is only one unexamined consequence

BY ROSS "ROCKY" ANDERSON

**Editor's note: Rocky Anderson has achieved a reputation for being a highly approachable mayor. (Visit the city's website at [www.ci.slc.ut.us/mayor](http://www.ci.slc.ut.us/mayor), then click on "events," for a schedule of his upcoming appearances, including Saturday morning gatherings.)**

**Mayor Anderson has agreed to share what's on his mind each month with Catalyst's readers. Practical, philosophical, mundane, highly charged — any issue is fair game. We begin with a big one: the transport of high-level radioactive waste.**

In the 1950s, our federal government lied to the American people, saying there were no dangers from above-ground nuclear bomb testing in Nevada. As a result, thousands of downwinders from Utah and several other states have suffered and died — and continue to suffer and die.

One cannot help but be perplexed to hear our President, Congress and federal administrative officials speak with such concern about "homeland defense," when they seem bent on unnecessarily exposing the American people to what may very well be the greatest security risk to face our country.

Now, after decades of broken promises and the reckless promotion of "clean" nuclear energy (perhaps the dirtiest industry in human history), our federal government is once again seeks to impose outrageous risks of lethal radiation exposure upon the American people, this time by transporting high-level nuclear waste — the most lethal material ever known to humankind — through 43 states and dozens of

metropolitan areas for storage at Yucca Mountain, Nevada.

The shipments, by truck and train, are expected to continue for 38 years, within a few yards of schools, residential areas, and crowded downtown centers. More of the high-level nuclear waste will be transported through the heart of Salt Lake City (which has never benefited from nuclear energy) than any other metropolitan area except Las Vegas. This is a terrorist's dream. And our worst nightmare.

When our nation decided to pursue nuclear energy, the assumption was that the highly lethal nuclear fuel would be reprocessed for repeated use of the fuel rods — and vast reduction of dangerous waste. However, reprocessing has proven to be a dismal failure, economically and environmentally. Notwithstanding the failure of reprocessing, our federal government and the private utility companies have frenetically — and irresponsibly —

promoted nuclear energy, without ever figuring out how to safely and permanently dispose of thousands of tons of nuclear waste that will remain extremely dangerous for tens of thousands of years. Congress set forth a "requirement" in the Nuclear Waste Policy Act of 1982 that the Secretary of Energy would nominate five sites for a repository in 1984, then recommend three to the President by January 1, 1985 for further study. Then, by March 31, 1987, the President was to recommend one site to Congress. By January 1, 1989, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission was to either reject the location

or issue a construction permit. Of course, none of that was ever done.

Now, after decades of delay, special-interest politicking, and the abject failure to deal with the devastating problem of nuclear waste, the federal government is seeking to sweep this nagging issue away by promising the communities that have benefited from nuclear power a "final solution." However, shipping nuclear fuel across our country for storage at Yucca Mountain is hardly a solution. It is a recipe for disaster.

Here is the situation in a nutshell: Forty-six thousand tons of lethal, high-level nuclear waste is now being stored at 131 locations throughout the country. If the Yucca Mountain proposal is approved, 3,000 tons of that nuclear waste will be transported each year, beginning about 2010. Since 2,000 tons of high-level nuclear waste are being produced in the nation each year, no more than 1,000 tons will be moved each year from current storage sites, which will hold 64,000 tons in 2010. Hence, by 2036, when Yucca Mountain is at capacity, only about 15% of the current national stockpile will have been moved to Yucca Mountain. Most, if not all, of the present storage sites will still be storing dangerous nuclear waste — and the nuclear power plants will continue to pose tremendous dangers to the American people from accidents or terrorist attacks.

A recent study by the International Atomic Energy Agency and Nuclear Energy Agency of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development found that the Department of Energy lacks sufficient information to predict the suitability and hydrogeologic performance of the proposed Yucca Mountain repository. There is no final transportation plan for the shipment of the nuclear materials through our nation. The casks used to ship the nuclear waste have never been physically tested to determine if they can withstand possible transportation accident and terrorist scenarios. Finally, and equally astounding, neither the DOE nor the Nuclear Regulatory Commission has assessed the terrorism risks inherent in the transportation of these dangerous materials through our cities.

Those who seem to believe we are in a better position to keep high-level nuclear waste out of Skull Valley if the Yucca Mountain project moves forward are fooling themselves — and perhaps others.

Storage at Yucca Mountain likely means storage at Skull Valley and transportation of waste through our communities every single day for 38 years. Accidents are cer-

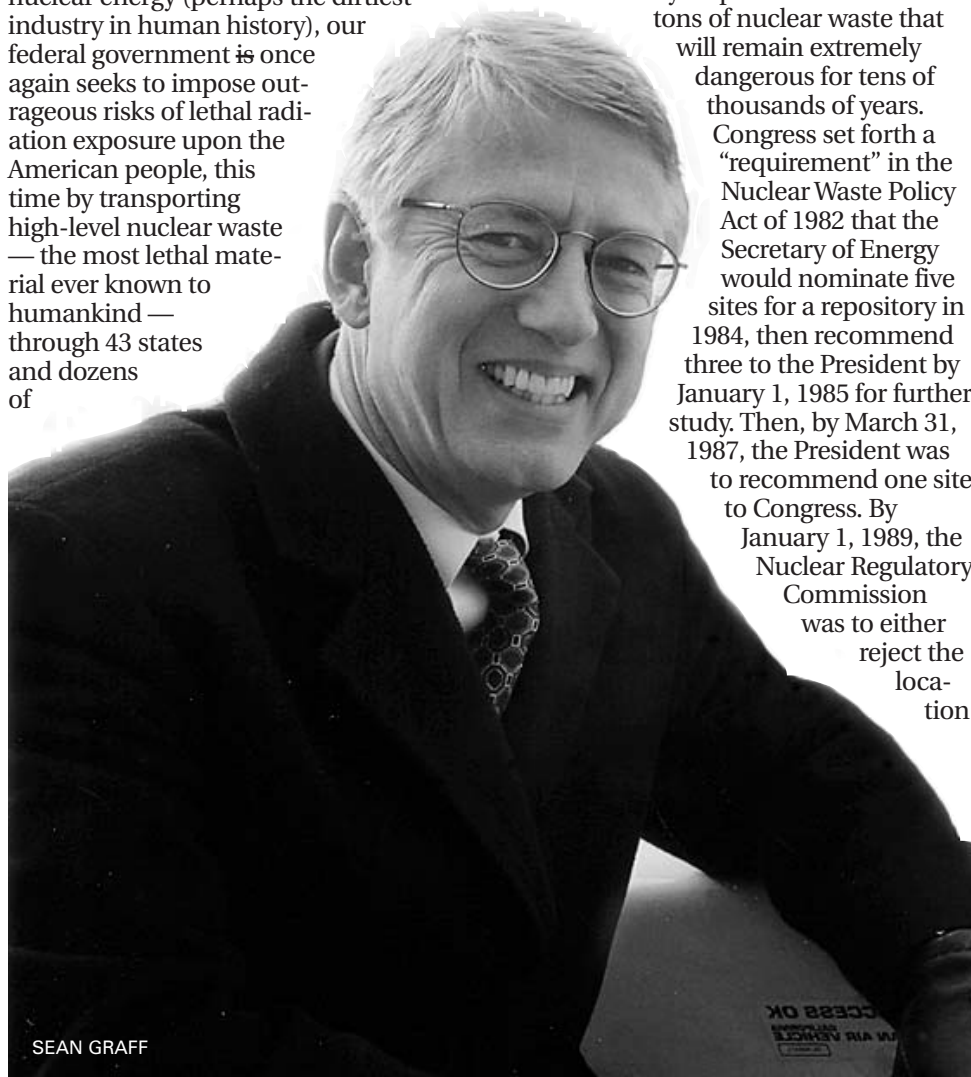
Instead of the 20% of our electric use now being provided by nuclear power plants, we could meet our needs through conservation and utilization of truly clean alternatives, such as geothermal, wind, and solar energy.

tain to occur — and terrorist attacks are a real possibility.

One can't help but be perplexed to hear our President, Congress and federal administrative officials speak with such concern about "homeland defense," when they seem bent on unnecessarily exposing the American people to what may very well be the greatest security risk to face our country. The best defense against daily potential exposure to dirty nuclear bombs in communities throughout our country would be to stop the production of nuclear waste by decommissioning nuclear power plants. Instead of the 20% of our electric use now being provided by nuclear power plants, we could meet our needs through conservation and utilization of truly clean alternatives, such as geothermal, wind, and solar energy.

The American people deserve the truth from our federal government. We deserve real, long-term solutions to our nuclear waste crisis. And we deserve real leadership. Perhaps there has never been a more crucial time for public action. Please call upon our senators, who have both indicated they are keeping their minds open on this issue, to vote against the short-sighted, potentially devastating Yucca Mountain proposal — and to move toward real, safe, permanent solutions to the problems posed by high-level nuclear waste. ♦

Rocky Anderson is the mayor of Salt Lake City.



SEAN GRAFF

## Mayors Make a Statement

Salt Lake Mayor Rocky Anderson, along with the mayors of Reno, Las Vegas, North Little Rock, Charlotte and Augusta, submitted a resolution to the U.S. Conference of Mayors last month, urging the United States Congress to pass legislation that prohibits the movement of any high level waste unless beginning three years prior to any such movement, all cities along the proposed transportation route have received adequate funds, training and equipment to protect the public health and safety in the event of an accident.

The resolution was overwhelmingly approved, with committee members agreeing that more studies are necessary before they would consider the shipment of high-level nuclear waste.