



It's Baaaaaaaack: A New Hampshire High-Level Radioactive Waste Dump?

Presidential Candidates Open to Expanded Role for Nuclear Power Must Answer the Question: Where would they Dump the Radioactive Wastes? If not Nevada, then the Granite State?

If the Presidential candidates are pro-nuclear power, then are they in favor of dumping high-level radioactive wastes in New Hampshire? All the Democratic candidates are opposed to the proposed national repository at the fatally flawed Yucca Mountain site in another early primary state, Nevada. But several Democrats are open to expanding nuclear power. Where then would they dump the radioactive wastes from old and new reactors?

Although Republican candidates, almost to a man, are both pro-nuclear power and pro-Yucca dump, they too must declare their position on a New Hampshire dumpsite. By the year 2010 at the latest, there will be enough commercial irradiated nuclear fuel in the U.S. to fill Yucca Mountain to its legal limit of 63,000 metric tons. Even assuming that Yucca opens, all waste generated after 2010, whether from old or new reactors, would still be excess to Yucca's capacity and destined for a second dumpsite.

In 1985, the U.S. Dept. of Energy (DOE) announced that New Hampshire was one of the states on its target list for the eastern repository. By 1986, a groundswell of public opposition culminated in nearly all of the Granite State town meetings passing resolutions against the proposed dumpsite – leading to the Reagan administration indefinitely postponing the eastern site search (to help New Hampshire Republican Judd Gregg win his race for the U.S. Senate).

But the Nuclear Waste Policy Act calls on DOE to report to the president and congress between 2007 and 2010 on the need for a second repository. In fact, the Bush administration has requested \$2 million in the Fiscal Year 2008 budget for DOE to begin work on this report.

Thus, the next President of the United States would preside not only over decisions on the opening of Yucca Mountain, but also over the possibility of seeking a second national dumpsite, this time in the east, perhaps in New Hampshire.

Given the disarray of the Yucca Mountain Project, and the growing doubt that this earthquake-plagued, volcanically-active, leaky dumpsite on Western Shoshone Indian land will ever open, the New Hampshire dumpsite proposal is again rearing its ugly head. But candidates have rarely, if ever, been asked their position on this issue.

Where the Democratic Candidates Stand

Biden, Clinton, Dodd, and Obama have expressed varying levels of openness to nuclear power as a way to supposedly address the climate crisis. Edwards, Gravel, Kucinich, and Richardson have expressed opposition to an expansion of nuclear power. What would the pro-nuclear Democrats do with radioactive wastes from new reactors?

Obama was asked this question directly at the Las Vegas debate on Nov. 15th. While Obama touted the potential for “superior nuclear technology,” he advocated keeping the growing inventory of atomic waste on site in storage at the reactors where it is generated. This is the current, risky status quo, at operating plants like Seabrook in New Hampshire, Vermont Yankee just across the border, and even at permanently shut down reactors like Maine Yankee and Yankee Rowe in Massachusetts.

He also expressed faith that technology would find a solution. In an Oct. 30th letter to Senator Harry Reid of Nevada expressing opposition to the Yucca dump on the eve of a Senate hearing, Obama wrote: “Among the possible alternatives that should be considered are finding another state willing to serve

as a permanent national repository or creating regional storage repositories.” Given Obama’s advocacy for new nuclear reactors, he could be asked if New Hampshire should serve as a regional “parking lot dump” or a permanent national sacrifice area.

Clinton expressed somewhat less confidence in nuclear power’s future at last July’s CNN-You Tube debate, saying “I’m agnostic about nuclear power...[U]ntil we figure out what we’re going to do with the waste and the cost, it’s very hard to see nuclear as a part of our future.” She concluded, however, “But that’s where American technology comes in...Let’s figure out what we’re going to do about the waste and the cost, if we think nuclear should be a part of the solution.” Is New Hampshire a part of that “solution” to waste and cost?

Biden has stated “Nuclear power is part of our present and must be part of our future.”

Dodd was quoted in the *Brattleboro Reformer* last spring “I will not take nuclear power off the table...If we’re going to deal with global warming, we’re going to have to deal with the grid...If you’re truly interested in reducing, as we should, the use of fossil fuels and nonrenewable sources of energy, then you’ve got to have that option on the table at least for consideration. And I don’t retreat at all from serious problems with waste and transportation.”

Yet Biden and Dodd have not been pressed on their position on a New Hampshire waste dump, DOE’s potential “Plan B” after Yucca.

Richardson, while often saying that nuclear power does not have a future, has not been asked how long the present will last. Asked what his alternative to Yucca is, he also expressed faith that “[t]here’s a technological solution, a scientific solution.” But will that involve New Hampshire?

Edwards has emphasized the lack of a waste solution as a primary reason he now opposes new reactors.

Kucinich and Gravel have been consistent and active nuclear power critics throughout their entire congressional and senatorial careers.

Where the Republican Candidates stand

All eight major Republican candidates are pro-nuclear power. Almost all have also supported opening the Yucca Mountain dumpsite. Yucca Mountain has a legal limit for only 63,000 metric tons of commercial high-level radioactive waste (plus another 7,000 metric tons of DOE waste). That much commercial waste will exist in the U.S. by 2010 at the latest. Where, then, would the Republican candidates bury wastes generated by old and new reactors after 2010? New Hampshire? This question has rarely, if ever, been asked.

What’s at Stake?

Several towns including Hillsborough, New Hampshire sit atop a large granite formation identified as the “Cardigan Pluton.” The rock body is part of the DOE’s Crystalline Rock Repository Project to site a second national nuclear waste repository. If selected, the populations declining a federal buyout would be subject to relocation and their property seized by eminent domain for the deep geological repository. This dubious distinction persists despite many geological and hydrological flaws in the candidate site including rock fractures, high amounts of rainfall, broad uncertainty about groundwater movement through the rock body and migration of radioactivity from nuclear waste into aquifers for drinking and agricultural irrigation supplies for large populations.

In addition to the environmental impacts, federal confiscation would adversely impact the deep historical significance of the area: the nearby town of Washington, the first town in the U.S. to be named after our first president, just after the Revolutionary War; numerous preserved stone arch masonry bridges; the Franklin Pierce Homestead, the home of the 14th President of the United States; the founding congregation and church of the Seventh Day Adventist denomination are examples. There is also the natural beauty of the area: forested hills, scenic lakes and river-ways. Much of this, along with picturesque, historic towns and villages would cease to exist if a national high-level radioactive waste dump opened in New Hampshire.

Prepared by Kevin Kamps and Paul Gunter, Beyond Nuclear
6930 Carroll Avenue, Suite 400, Takoma Park, Maryland 20912
www.beyondnuclear.org (301) 270-2209 11/25/07