

Reid: Yucca should be junked Senator says e-mails reveal fabricated research

By Thomas Burr
The Salt Lake Tribune

U.S. Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid told a Salt Lake City audience Friday that e-mails exposing fraudulent Yucca Mountain research should scuttle the idea of transporting and storing nuclear waste at the Nevada site.

Reid, a Mormon who is in Utah for the LDS Church's General Conference this weekend, said he has always believed there was false information used to justify the Yucca project and the e-mails that surfaced Friday show "that would be the case." The e-mails reveal government scientists were planning to fabricate information when approving a part of the Yucca project.

"This is worse than the Enron stuff," Democrat Reid said, noting the messages may show criminal activity. "These are federal employees. We need to have a slower look taken at this. I think they're just really bad."

Reid, who spoke at the University of Utah's Hinckley Institute of Politics, referred to internal messages between scientists who were probing whether storing up to 77,000 tons of nuclear waste would affect groundwater.

The Associated Press reported Friday that a U.S. Geological Survey employee wrote in an e-mail released by a congressional committee probing suspected falsification on the project that, "This is as good as it's going to get. If they need more proof, I will be happy to make up more stuff."

Besides concerns about the science backing Yucca, Reid said later that Americans will not stand for nuclear waste being transported anywhere because of the dangers of shipping it.

"Every one of those trains and trucks are a target for terrorists," Reid said. "I just don't think people are going to allow nuclear waste to be [transported]."

Reid said nuclear waste - created for defense reasons or in generating nuclear energy - should stay where it is created and added that Utah's congressional delegation should stand with him to support legislation he plans to introduce, probably this month, to have the government take control of the waste and store it at the reactors.

Asked whether he could get Utah's U.S. Sens. Bob Bennett and Orrin Hatch on board with him, Reid said he wasn't sure. Both Utah senators backed the Yucca project in a 2002 vote.

"It's pretty obvious that they could have helped us and they didn't," Reid said, though he noted earlier that "two Utah senators seem to be a little interested now" in blocking waste movement.

While the long-delayed and controversial Yucca site is on hold, Utah could end up storing thousands of tons of nuclear waste on the Goshute Indian Reservation in Tooele County. State officials have failed in several attempts to bar storage there.

When the discussion turned to religion, Reid said that conservatives do not have a lock on church-going Americans and that more progressive followers should stand up to make their voices heard. He mentioned an edict from the LDS church's leaders that is read before every election declaring that the church does not endorse a political party. "I just wish that members of the church would listen to what they're saying," he said.

On another issue, Reid said that the proposal to nudge Utah's state line east so that Utah's Wendover could merge with its Nevada counterpart would never happen. Reid, who has been the top recipient of gambling campaign contributions, has blocked the concept of changing the state line out of concern for the investments the casinos have made in Wendover.

"Utah's going to have to keep Wendover," Reid declared.



U.S. Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., speaks before an overflow crowd Friday at the University of Utah in Salt Lake. (Douglas C. Pizac/The Associated Press)