

DOE Hearing. America's Center. 1/20/00

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I've come here tonight to speak out against the proposal to transport high level nuclear waste across the country and through our community. Speaking as the father of two, speaking for myself and for my wife, and speaking as well, I am sure for large numbers of people residing in our Saint Louis area, I feel it is absolutely unconscionable to put ordinary citizens at needless risk in this manner.

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Most of the waste to be shipped should never have been produced in the first place. Be that as it may, whatever the original reasons for the production of these noxious substances, whether as a byproduct of defense or energy, we are now left with their aftermath. It remains for us to cope as intelligently as we can with the potentially catastrophic effects they may have.

Although the specific situation differs somewhat, one might do well to consider an analogy with the transportation of vast quantities of oil via supertankers. Once touted as safe and efficient, supertankers now produce environmental catastrophes on a regular basis through accidents as well as constant environmental degradation simply through their normal operations. Shipping nuclear waste has yet an infinitely greater potential than oil to cause harm, not just to the environment but directly to people as well.

The risks of shipping this nuclear waste are considerable, and should not be minimized as government functionaries inevitably do. These are many and varied, and include potential accidents such as fire, derailing, collisions, natural catastrophes and leakage as well as the distinct possibility of nuclear terrorism.

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Furthermore, one should not make the mistake of thinking that we are speaking here of low level nuclear radiation. The total amount of radioactivity in the fuel rods which would be shipped is the equivalent of 2.3 million atomic bombs. With their long half-lives, this waste remains dangerous to all living beings virtually indefinitely. No fool-proof containers exist for the storage of these wastes, much less for their transportation.

It seems perfectly clear to me that without even going into the potential problems of the plan to store radioactive waste at Yucca Mountain, the plan to transport the waste through American communities such as ours is fatally flawed right from the start. I urge the Department of Energy to abandon this irresponsible and foolhardy project.

Seth A. Carlin