

put on a concrete slab. In the year 2010 we will start taking it and putting it in that hole, that tunnel in the mountain, and we will seal that sucker up. You think about it. We will put 84,000 tons of spent nuclear fuel in this tunnel in Yucca Mountain and seal that thing. No guards and no monitors walking up and down hallways, putting a Geiger counter on it and see what the radiation is that is coming out of it. We will seal it up forever.

Now, before I get to the end of this tale, let me go back a moment and say this stuff is going to be in Yucca Mountain for thousands and thousands of years. And you know why? Because that is how long it is radioactive. You know what we are debating here today? Ten years. We are saying we cannot wait 10 years to make sensible decisions that affect the lives of every man, woman, and child in America. We have to do it right now because the utility industry is unhappy. They want us to take it now and transport it to Yucca Mountain and get it out of their back door. If they would have listened to me 20 years ago, they would not have a problem because they would not have all that waste. I was not that powerful then. I am not that powerful now either.

But think about this: We are talking about planting 84,000 tons of spent nuclear fuel in Yucca Mountain, to be proposed for thousands and thousands of years, and S. 104 says we cannot wait 10 years to find out. We cannot wait until August of next year to determine whether or not Yucca Mountain is a suitable repository. This is a monumental decision. We are not talking about the Kentucky Derby. We are talking about thousands of tons of lethal spent fuel and how we will dispose of it safely so the American people can sleep at night.

I share the concern of the Senator from Alaska about disposing of this stuff. I am not trying to drag my feet. Everybody knows we have to dispose of this stuff. We are talking about what is the best way to do it. What is in the national interest? What is sensible? What is the safest way to do it?

It is tragic that the Energy Department has to renege on its agreement, but it cannot help it. It was not their fault. It really was not anybody's fault that we did not get this all done by 1998. But the Energy Department says certainly if it is found suitable, we believe we can start taking this stuff by the year 2010 and doing it properly and in a way that everybody will find to be suitable and satisfying.

So what happens under this bill? If Yucca Mountain is found to be unsuitable next August, you have to go ahead and build this thing anyway, this interim storage site, unless the President of the United States finds an alternative site and Congress approves that alternative site all within 2 years. If anybody believes you can do that, hold up your hand. That is an absolutely impossible condition in S. 104. The

President cannot find another site and get Congress to approve that site within 2 years. We have been working on Yucca Mountain forever, and now we are in a posture of finally concluding a happy end to this situation. But even if Yucca Mountain is found to be unsuitable, S. 104 of the Senator from Alaska will still require that every pound of nuclear waste in this country be transported to Yucca Mountain, even though that is not going to be the permanent repository site.

So what happens then? We find another permanent repository site. We will load it all up and bring it back through Charleston, AR, once again. That will make the citizens happy. They already had the daylighters scared out of them bringing the fuel through their hometowns once. Now they will get it again. So why take it in the first place? Why not at least give the administration and the utility industry an opportunity to work out some kind of an arrangement whereby we will pay them—they are suing us now, and frankly they have a good lawsuit. I do not deny that. They have a good lawsuit. We agreed to take it in 1998, and we cannot do it. So we will have to pay.

So my question is why not pay them to leave it where it is for a few months until we can make a decision about the suitability of Yucca Mountain and proceed the way we have been proceeding?

Now, Mr. President, let me just close by making something of a confession. It is tempting to me to support this proposition. I would not vote for S. 104 under any circumstances, but the concept set out in S. 104 makes it very appealing and very attractive. As I say, I would not vote for an interim storage site right now because we are coming up on the time when we will know with some degree of certainty whether or not Yucca Mountain will be the place. Can we not wait? America, this is the central question. Can we not wait 10 years to determine that this is the safest place in the world and the best place in the world to store this stuff for thousands of years? What is 10 years in the scheme of the thousands of years that this stuff will be stored there?

The options are not good either way. I do not blame the utilities for wanting to get rid of the stuff, but I do not blame us for not wanting to take it. It is folly in the extreme for us to take that stuff out there and spend an extra \$2 billion to put in a concrete slab when we know, or will know next August almost to a reasonable degree of certainty, a year from now we will know whether or not we will be able to use Yucca Mountain, and if we are, would it not be infinitely better to transport that fuel one time—not twice, not three times—one time, to put it in a site in which we will all feel comfortable?

Mr. President, I know there are plenty of votes in this place to pass this bill. I know the President will veto it when it is presented to him. We will see

what happens after that. I am trying to call for a degree of sanity and reasonableness and saying I would like to get rid of it, too. Nobody has any stronger desire to get rid of this nuclear waste than I have.

The Senator from Nevada and I will probably be on opposite sides next time. If Yucca Mountain is found to be suitable, you can bet I will vote to put it there. I have not supported the Senators from Nevada because I like them, because they are friends; I supported them because I thought they were right. I have supported the Energy Department and the administration's position on this because I think they are right.

I am asking my colleagues, I know they are getting a lot of pressure on them both from the industry and the party and different people, but I tell you something, when you start playing politics with this issue, I plead for my colleagues to remember, people may disagree with you, but they like people who stand up for what they believe, even when it is not popular. People sometimes say to me, why do you guys not screw up your nerve and do something right, something courageous for a change? I hear that all the time. Do you know what they mean by courageous? Unpopular. If it is popular, it is not courageous.

Here is a bill that is very complicated, and the American people are not homed in on it. The people here know what they are doing. I am asking, for Pete's sake, listen to this debate and do what they think is sensible, in the best interests of the country.

I yield the floor. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that there now be a period for the transaction of morning business with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 5 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### THE VERY BAD DEBT BOXSCORE

Mr. HELMS. Mr. President, at the close of business yesterday, Monday, April 7, 1997, the Federal debt stood at \$5,385,190,477,419.92.

Five years ago, April 7, 1992, the Federal debt stood at \$3,891,976,000,000.

Ten years ago, April 7, 1987, the Federal debt stood at \$2,288,906,000,000.

Fifteen years ago, April 7, 1982, the Federal debt stood at \$1,060,872,000,000.