

NUCLEAR WASTE STORAGE

Mr. LOTT. Madam President, I urge my colleagues to allow the body to move forward with regard to the nuclear waste storage bill. More than 15 years ago, Congress directed the Department of Energy to take responsibility for the disposal of nuclear waste created by commercial nuclear powerplants and our Nation's defense programs. Today, there are more than 100,000 tons of spent nuclear fuel that must be dealt with.

Quite some time has now passed since DOE was absolutely obligated under the NWPA Act of 1982 to begin accepting spent nuclear fuel from utility sites.

All across this country, we have sites where nuclear waste products are in open pools, cooling pools. Many of those are filling up. A number of States have a major problem.

In my opinion, this is one of the most important environmental issues we have to face as a nation. We have to deal with this problem. There have been billions of dollars spent on it. There has been time put into thinking about the proper way to do it. States all across this country, from Vermont to Mississippi to Minnesota to Washington, believe very strongly that we need to address this issue.

Apparently today, DOE is no closer in coming up with a solution. This is totally unacceptable. This is, in fact, wrong, so say the Federal courts. The law is clear, and DOE has not met its obligation, so the Congress must act.

I am encouraged that Senator MURKOWSKI and his committee have addressed the issue and they have come up with a different bill than the one we considered the year before last. They have made concessions, they have made improvements, and I thought we had a bill that was going to be generally overwhelmingly accepted.

I do think when we get over procedural hurdles, when the final vote is taken on this nuclear waste disposal bill, the vote will probably be in the high seventies or eighties when it is actually voted on, and that is an important point. The Senate will vote by overwhelming numbers for this legislation, so we need to move through the process.

I know there is opposition from the Senators from Nevada, and they have to have an opportunity to make their case and offer amendments if they feel the need to do so, as well as other Senators. But I think it is so important that we cannot allow it to languish any longer. It is a bipartisan effort that came out of the committee. It is safe, practical, and it is a workable solution for America's spent fuel storage needs.

This is the proper storage of spent fuel, and it is not being done in a partisan way. It is dealt with as a safety issue. Where is DOE? Well, about where it is always, I guess. What is their solution? If not this, what?

They have not given us any answers or any indications of how they would

like to proceed with this. All of America's experience in waste management over the last 25 years of improving environmental protection has taught Congress that safe, effective waste handling practices entail using centralized, permitted, and controlled facilities to gather and manage accumulated waste.

I took the time to go to Sweden and France and to meet with officials from the private sector in Britain. I looked at how they have dealt with their waste problem. They have dealt with it. Sweden has; France has; Britain and Japan; but not the United States. Why? We are the most developed country in the world, yet we have not dealt with this very important issue. So after over 25 years of working with this problem, DOE has still not made specific plans.

The management of used nuclear fuel should capitalize on the knowledge and experience we have. Nearly 100 communities have this spent fuel sitting in their "backyards," and it needs to be gathered, accumulated, and placed in a secure and safe place. This lack of a central storage capacity could very possibly cause the closing of several nuclear powerplants.

These affected plants produce nearly 20 percent of America's electricity. Closing these plants does not make sense. But if we do not do something with the waste, that could be the result.

Nuclear energy is a significant part of America's energy future and must remain part of the energy mix. America needs nuclear power to maintain our secure, reliable, and affordable supplies of electricity. At the same time, nuclear power allows the Nation to directly and effectively address increasingly stringent air quality requirements.

I challenge my colleagues in the Chamber, on both sides of the aisle, to get this bill done. We spent a lot of time on it the year before last. We ran into the blue slip problem with the House. We will not have that problem with this bill.

The citizens in these communities are looking for us to act. The nuclear industry had already committed to the Federal Government about \$15 billion toward building the facility by 1998. The industry has continued to pay between \$40 and \$80 billion in fees for storage of this spent fuel.

It is time for the Federal Government to honor its commitment to the American people and to the power community. It is time for the Federal Government to protect these 100 communities to ensure that the Federal Government meets its commitment to States and electricity consumers. The 106th Congress must mandate completion of this program—a program that gives the Federal Government title to waste currently stored on-site at facilities across the Nation, a site for permanent disposal, and a transportation infrastructure to safely move the used fuel from plants to the storage facility.

Again, I have had people express concerns to me about how this can be done safely. I actually took the time to look at the equipment that is used to move this spent fuel in other countries, particularly in France, and they have done it safely, without a single incident—no problem ever. Again, they are doing it in France. Can't we do it in America?

Our foot dragging is unfortunate. It is unacceptable. Clearly, we must move this legislation. The only remedy to stop the delays—and it is a timely action—is for the Senate to consider this in the 106th Congress.

Let's move forward and get this legislation done.

Madam President, I see Senator REID is here.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—
S. 1287

Mr. LOTT. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the nuclear waste bill, S. 1287, following passage of the bankruptcy bill.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. REID. Madam President, reserving the right to object, I say to my friend, the majority leader, that on the surface it does appear that something needs to be done with nuclear waste. If you get under the surface, of course, there should be something done.

I am not going to give a long dissertation now on nuclear waste. We have had that in the past. But the fact of the matter is, really what should happen is, it should stay where it is. That is what the scientists say. It could be safely stored on site in dry cast storage containment, as is done in Calvert Cliffs, MD, for the next 100 years.

The nuclear power industry, which has created this fiasco, wants someone else to clean up their mess. They want it out of their hands. They want their hands washed of it.

The fact of the matter is, we are looking at this legislation. Senator MURKOWSKI is trying to come up with some alternative. I have been told by the minority on the Energy Committee that if that is the case, he is going to try to change the legislation that is now before this body. That is, the legislation now before this body would take the Environmental Protection Agency out of the mix; that is, the Environmental Protection Agency would not be setting the standards for Yucca Mountain, but it would be given to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, which, in fact, is the one that does licensing. That really is literally having the fox guard the hen house.

In this legislation, we simply want things to remain the way they are—have the Environmental Protection Agency set the standards. But we understand there is a lot of agitation by the very powerful nuclear power industry, that wants to move this forward in spite of the fact that it could damage