

Editorial: Chicago Tribune 9/20/17

# Illinois, the nuclear waste state

A sign warns of fall risk on the crest of Yucca Mountain during a congressional tour in April 2015, near Mercury, Nev. Several members of Congress toured the proposed radioactive waste dump 90 miles northwest of Las Vegas. (John Locher / AP)

## Editorial Board

*“The Land of Lincoln is the country’s largest de facto nuclear waste dump.”*

— Kevin McDermott, writing in *Illinois Issues* magazine.

Nuclear power supplies one-fifth of America’s electricity. It’s reliable, proven and immune to upheaval in oil-producing nations or domestic hurricane zones. Equally important these days, it produces none of the greenhouse gas emissions that are heating up the planet. The downside is that it does produce radioactive waste, which requires secure disposal. And secure disposal has been painfully hard to come by.

**Comment [F1]:** This is factually incorrect.

That’s not for any technical or logistical reason. Quite the contrary, it’s a simple task. In 1987, after much study, the federal government settled on the perfect place for this spent fuel: a remote site in Nevada called Yucca Mountain, where it could be buried deep underground, posing no danger to anyone. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission

**Comment [F2]:** Not correct. The NWPA was passed in 1982, and was supposed to study 8-9 sites nationwide. Politics took the other sites out of contention, leaving ONLY Yucca Mt.; and Congress explicitly prohibited DOE from studying any other site. So – Yucca was not “studied,” it was selected and then rationalized.

confirmed in a 2014 report that this repository would keep the waste contained for 1 million years. Even the local jackrabbits and tarantulas would have nothing to worry about.

**Comment [F3]:** This was never determined. See above.

**Comment [F4]:** ...EXCEPT that the discovery of 36-CI INSIDE the Mountain proved that pathways exist for water – and waste – to get in or go out of the Mountain. CL-36 comes from nuclear weapons, so either the Neanderthals were smarter than we thought, or the Mountain has leakage pathways proved from our nearby nuclear weapons tests.

Taxpayers and ratepayers have been dunned for the cost of building and maintaining the facility. But so far, all they’ve gotten for their money is a giant, vacant hole in the ground.

**Comment [F5]:** ...and ALSO stated in a 2014 report that the spent-fuel was perfectly safe stored at reactor sites, for as much as 100 years. Meaning – there’s really no urgency to justify rash actions

In the meantime, some 80,000 tons of waste has piled up at 80 far less secure temporary sites in 35 states, and the piles are growing all the time. Want to guess which state has acquired the largest stash while waiting for Yucca Mountain to open for business? That’s right: Illinois.

**Comment [F6]:** Storage is almost ALWAYS less secure than disposal; this is a meaningless observation. But, if you’re REALLY worried about the security of the waste, this suggests that all nuclear reactors should be closed immediately, since that’s where the waste IS, and more is being made daily at these “less secure” facilities..

The road from Illinois to the Nevada site has been blocked by an array of regulatory hurdles and lawsuits. Even more troublesome was another immovable obstacle: Nevada’s

**Comment [F7]:** ...just this year received a “D” grade for roads, and “D-” grade for rails by The American Society of Civil Engineers this past Spring. Are you suggesting that high-level radwaste is “safer” on these roads at 40-60 mph, than stationary at fully staffed and guarded nuclear reactor sites??

Sen. [Harry Reid](#), the longtime [Senate Democratic leader](#), who declared in 2006, “Yucca Mountain is dead. It’ll never happen.” He and fellow Senate [Democrats](#) kept it from happening, and President Barack Obama, who campaigned on a promise to stop it, was fully on board with them — a political reward for Reid’s fealty.

**Comment [F8]:** This selective and blatant distortion of the FULL political history of Yucca Mt. demonstrates either a profound ignorance or borders on deliberate fraud. Yes, Reid and Obama played “politics,” but they were latecomers. At least 7 Dem and Repub Senators, and Pres. George W. Bush beat them to it since 1986; and Rep. Shimkus is doing the same right now.

President [Donald Trump](#), by contrast, wants to finally get the repository online. His proposed budget for 2018 includes \$120 million to get the licensing process going so the government can bring this overdue project to fulfillment. Energy Secretary Rick Perry has called it a “moral obligation.” With Reid now retired and [Republicans](#) in control of the House and Senate, it should be possible to finally get Yucca Mountain in operation. This is the moment.

**Comment [F9]:** Current estimates to restart the program put the annual figure in the \$2-3 BILLION range. And Nevada has over 200 legal contentions they are ready to litigate.

But is it? Nevada’s Republican Sen. [Dean Heller](#), who is up for re-election next year, is no more fond of the idea than Reid was. “Nevada will not serve as our nation’s nuclear waste dump,” vowed Heller, who put a hold on a high Energy Department appointment over the issue. And, former Deputy Assistant Energy Secretary Robert L. Ferguson wrote in the Aug. 16 Wall Street Journal, “The GOP leadership, desperate for votes to repeal Obamacare, wants to protect one of its own.”

**Comment [F10]:** Why should he be? His job is to protect Nevada from being gang-raped by the other 98 Senators. Sens. Durbin and Duckworth would do the same if IL were picked. We’ll see if they do, since IL has been analyzed to be THE optimal site for the first national “centralized interim storage”(CIS) facility in a 2012 Oak Ridge National Lab report.

**We hope that’s a passing fancy.** Congressional Republicans — not to mention Democrats from Illinois and other states stuck with casks of spent fuel — **know that the problem needs to be solved and that** there is no better option.

**Comment [F11]:** YES there IS; and it’s been proposed by safe-energy and environmental groups since 2002, but repeatedly rejected by the NRC and the nuclear industry, because they didn’t want to spend the extra money for more robust storage at reactors called “hardened onsite storage” (HOSS).

This isn’t an issue that excites many voters who don’t live near nuclear plants, but it ought to be a crucial priority for members of the Illinois delegation. Now is their chance **to safeguard nuclear waste in a** much more secure location and also improve the outlook for nuclear energy. Otherwise, we could be waiting a million years.

**Comment [F12]:** ...than what?

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