

OFFICE OF SENATOR HARRY REID

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Reid Calls on GAO to Consider Alternative Uses for Yucca Mountain Project Site

Letter to Comptroller General suggests potential uses related to national security and clean energy

February 2, 2010

Washington, DC – Nevada Senator Harry Reid today sent a letter to Gene Dodaro, the Comptroller General of the United States, regarding potential future uses of the Yucca Mountain project site and related facilities. In the letter, Reid asks that the Government Accountability Office (GAO) consult with the state of Nevada and relevant federal agencies about how the site could be used for activities unrelated to storing nuclear waste, including:

- National security activities, including armed services readiness, intelligence gathering, and defense technology testing and demonstration;
- Renewable energy technology development, testing, and demonstration;
- Arms control, verification, weapons detection, and other nonproliferation-related activities;
- Science and/or engineering laboratory for sensitive work requiring either underground or remote experimentation, or;
- Facility for government continuity-of-operations activities.

“Now that forward progress on making Yucca Mountain the dumpsite for the nation’s nuclear waste has ended, we now need to keep this from being a total loss to the taxpayers and find a responsible way to use the Yucca facility,” Reid said. “Given the site’s location at the Nevada Test Site and Nevada’s vast clean energy resources, I believe we should begin by looking at alternative uses focused on our national security and clean energy efforts.”

A copy of Reid’s letter is included below.

February 2, 2010

The Honorable Gene Dodaro
Acting Comptroller General of the United States
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear General Dodaro:

As you may know, in the President’s Fiscal Year 2011 Budget Request he provided zero funding for the Yucca Mountain nuclear waste repository and announced that the license application to construct the repository will be withdrawn in Fiscal Year 2010. Furthermore, Energy Secretary Steven Chu recently announced the creation of the Blue Ribbon Commission on America’s Nuclear Future, which will produce a

report of final recommendations on alternative solutions to managing the nation's nuclear waste within 24 months.

I have spent many years working to stop this ill-conceived project, which threatened the health and safety of Nevadans, the vitality of southern Nevada's economy, and our environment. I am proud that my efforts and the efforts of other Nevada leaders have paid off and Nevadans will no longer have to fear becoming the nation's nuclear waste dump. At the same time, I believe that Yucca Mountain and the surrounding land may have unique characteristics and existing infrastructure that justify close consideration of potential alternative uses for the site other than for nuclear waste storage. Therefore, I request that the Government Accountability Office (GAO) prepare a report outlining options for potential uses of the Yucca Mountain project site, project facilities, and the land surrounding the site.

In preparing this report, GAO should consult with the State of Nevada and an array of federal agencies, including the: National Nuclear Security Administration; Department of Energy; Department of Defense – including the relevant services; Intelligence Community; State Department; Department of the Interior; National Science Foundation; and any other party that might be interested in possible future uses of the Yucca Mountain project site.

Specifically, GAO should consider how the Yucca Mountain project site and related facilities and land could be used:

1. for national security activities, including armed services readiness, intelligence gathering, and defense technology testing and demonstration;
2. for renewable energy technology development, testing, and demonstration;
3. for arms control, verification, weapons detection, and other nonproliferation-related activities;
4. as a science and/or engineering laboratory for sensitive work requiring either underground or remote experimentation; and
5. as a facility for federal government continuity-of-operations activities.

Additionally, I request that GAO consider the legal steps that might be necessary for Congress or the Administration to take in order to pursue new activities at the Yucca Mountain project site that do not involve storing spent nuclear fuel or nuclear waste.

If you have any questions regarding this request, please do not hesitate to contact me or have your staff contact Alex McDonough of my staff at (202) 224-1052.

Sincerely,

Harry Reid
United States Senator

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