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WASHINGTON -- Energy Department hopes to transport nuclear waste to Yucca Mountain down a western Nevada corridor were dealt a possibly fatal blow in April when the Walker River Paiute Tribe withdrew its cooperation on a railroad route through its reservation.

The tribal council passed a resolution removing the tribe from a federal environmental impact study that included a rail segment for shipments of spent nuclear fuel along the outskirts of its sovereign lands north of Walker Lake.



The Walker River Paiutes faced growing pressures from their membership and from neighboring communities that were becoming increasingly vocal against the possibility of nuclear waste traveling through Northern Nevada.

"After considering the information we had gathered to date and discussions with our membership, the tribal council made the decision not to continue with the Department of Energy's process," tribal Chairwoman Genia Williams said in a statement. "The tribe will not allow nuclear waste to be transported on rail through our reservation," Williams said.

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Nuclear power enters global warming debate

WASHINGTON The renewed push for legislation to cut greenhouse gas emissions could falter over an old debate: whether nuclear power should play a role in any federal attack on climate change.

Congress, with added impetus from a Supreme Court ruling last week, appears more likely to pass comprehensive energy legislation. But nuclear power sharply divides lawmakers who agree on mandatory caps on carbon dioxide emissions. And it has pitted some on Capitol Hill against their usual allies, environmentalists, who largely oppose any expansion of nuclear power.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Sen. Barbara Boxer Bay Area Democrats with similar political views are on opposite sides.

Pelosi used to be an ardent foe of nuclear power but now holds a different view. "I think it has to be on the table," she said.

Boxer, head of the Senate committee that will take the lead in writing global warming legislation, said that turning from fossil fuels to nuclear power was "trading one problem for another."

Sens. John McCain (R-Ariz.), Barack Obama (D-Ill.) and Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-N.Y.) all presidential candidates support legislation that would cap greenhouse gas emissions and provide incentives to power companies to build more nuclear plants.

Opponents of nuclear power say that because a terrorist attack on a plant could be catastrophic, it makes no sense to build more potential targets. And radioactive waste still has no permanent burial site, they say, despite officials' three decades of trying to find one.

But attitudes toward nuclear power may be shifting as a consensus emerges that greenhouse gases are causing the world to heat up.

The Supreme Court added its voice, criticizing the Bush administration for not acting to control greenhouse gases.

Max Schulz, a former Energy Department staff member who is a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute, a conservative think tank, said the ruling could help "spur the revival of nuclear power."

And congressional Democratic leaders have made passage of global warming legislation a priority.

"I've never been a fan of nuclear energy," said Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.), who has called it expensive and risky.

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"But reducing emissions from the electricity sector presents a major challenge. And if we can be assured that new technologies help to produce nuclear energy safely and cleanly, then I think we have to take a look at it."

The public's attitude toward nuclear power is more favorable when such energy is seen as part of an effort to fight climate change. Polls over the years have shown that a slim majority backs nuclear power, but a Los Angeles Times/Bloomberg survey last summer found that a larger majority, 61%, supported the increased use of nuclear energy "to prevent global warming."

Legislation introduced recently in California seeks to repeal a 1976 ban on new nuclear plants in the state.

"There's no question that the attention to climate change over the last several years has materially changed the public discussion of nuclear power," said Jason Grumet, executive director of the National Commission on Energy Policy, a bipartisan group of energy experts. Given the threat of global warming, he said, "it's hard to ignore the principal source of noncarbon power generation in the country today."

One environmental group has tried to keep an open mind. "We don't think any options should be taken off the table when dealing with global warming," said Environmental Defense spokesman Charlie Miller.

The nuclear power industry in the U.S. has been at a virtual standstill because of high construction costs, regulatory uncertainties and public apprehension after a 1979 accident at Pennsylvania's Three Mile Island.

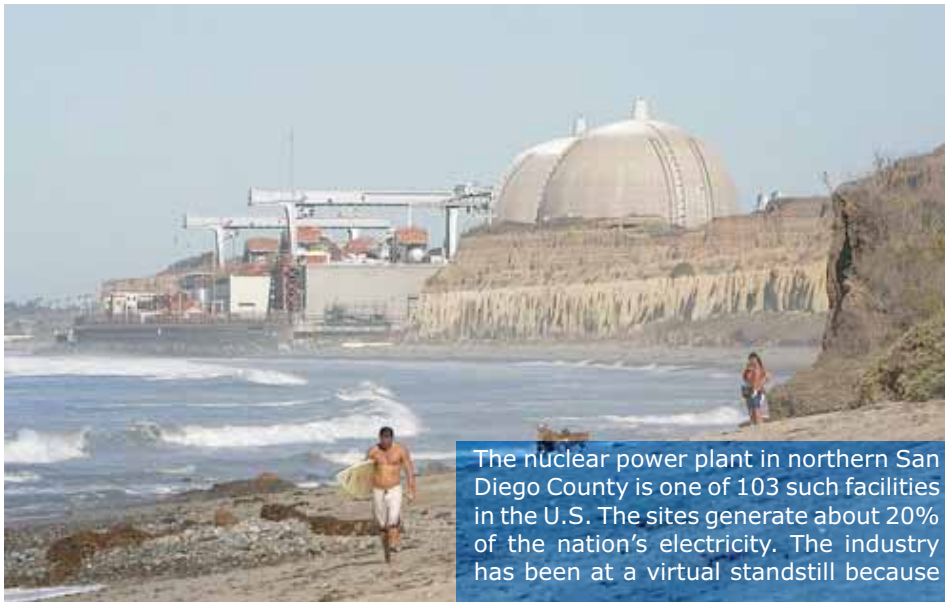
Nuclear power enters

A number of plants ordered before the accident went into operation. But many more were canceled after one of the Three Mile Island reactors suffered a partial meltdown and small amounts of radiation were released into the atmosphere.

Reviving the industry has been a priority for President Bush, who sees nuclear power as crucial to meeting a growing demand for electricity.

McCain said he had no idea whether he would be more successful this time. But he said there was "no way that you could ever seriously attack the issue of greenhouse gas emissions without nuclear power, and anybody who tells you differently is not telling the truth."

On Capitol Hill last month, former Vice President Al Gore, who has become a leading advocate for swift action on climate change, said he saw nuclear plants as a "small part"



The nuclear power plant in northern San Diego County is one of 103 such facilities in the U.S. The sites generate about 20% of the nation's electricity. The industry has been at a virtual standstill because

"They're so expensive, and they take so long to build, and at present they only come in one size: extra large," he said.

"And people don't want to make that kind of investment in an uncertain market for energy demand."

The McCain-Lieberman bill, which seeks to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 to a third of 2000 levels, would provide federal loans or guarantees

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission expects to receive applications for about two dozen new plants in the next few years in part because of provisions in a 2005 energy bill designed to promote nuclear power.

Currently, 103 nuclear plants including Diablo Canyon near San Luis Obispo and San Onofre in northern San Diego County generate about 20% of the nation's electricity.

The amount of congressional support for nuclear power is unclear.

When McCain and Sen. Joe Lieberman (I-Conn.) added subsidies for nuclear power to their 2005 bill to cut greenhouse gas emissions, they lost support from environmentalists and votes in Congress, including Boxer's.

to subsidize as many as three advanced reactor projects.

The U.S. Public Interest Research Group and Public Citizen said the bill would authorize more than \$3.7 billion in subsidies for new nuclear plants

Sen. Thomas R. Carper (D-Del.), a cosponsor of the McCain-Lieberman legislation, thinks support for nuclear power could bring more votes.

"Three or four years ago, if you included nuclear, you lost more than you gained," he said. "Today ... you pick up more than you lose."

But nuclear power faces huge political and economic obstacles.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) remains opposed to the planned

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Fresno a player in debate over nuclear power

Fresno, a fast-growing former farming community popularly associated with raisins, is seeking a higher-tech image -- as the future home of a nuclear power plant that could supply power for 1.6 million to 2 million homes.

"Nuclear power holds great promise for the entire San Joaquin Valley," Fresno Mayor Alan Autry told reporters in December, when a group of local businessmen unveiled plans for the plant. "We must find a way to become energy self-sufficient."

The Fresno plan is one of dozens for new power plants in the United States, where the rising costs of natural gas and coal, concerns about global warming, and \$8 billion in incentives from the federal government are renewing interest in atomic energy.

Almost all of the 30 applications for new reactors expected in the next few years are likely to come from Southern states, which need relief from the cost and pollution of coal plants.

While wider acceptance of nuclear power might be more of a struggle in California due to a strong anti-nuclear movement and a 31-year ban on reactor development, some experts think many of the proposed reactors in other states will be built.

Groups in Virginia, Maryland, Idaho, Texas, Michigan and New York are considering building new plants, but the nuclear power industry sees its brightest future in Southeastern states, which, unlike California, look to nuclear plants as engines of economic development.

The first formal applications for new plants are expected to begin coming into the Nuclear Regulatory Commission later this year, said agency spokesman David McIntyre.

"Nuclear energy seems to be poised on the verge of a significant rebirth in this country and around the world," Rep. David Hobson, R-Ohio, said at a House of Representatives hearing in September. "For reasons of energy independence, national security and

reducing greenhouse gas emissions, nuclear energy seems to be our best option for providing significant base load generating capacity in the foreseeable future."

Credit for the newfound interest in nuclear power can be traced to the Bush administration, which was responsible for the 2005 Energy Policy Act. The act, approved by Congress, dangled \$8 billion in incentives for nuclear power plant construction. Since then, more than 20 utilities and private groups have

commercial reactors -- in the next 23 years would not only significantly reduce the amount of greenhouse gases released into the atmosphere, but would also help meet the nation's electricity needs, institute officials say.

Such an increase in nuclear plant production would mark quite a reversal in fortune for an industry whose domestic sales have been stagnant thanks to cost overruns and numerous atomic power accidents, most notoriously at Three Mile Island in Pennsylvania in 1979.



Downtown Fresno, CA

McIntyre said it's been nearly 33 years since an application was received for a nuclear power plant that was subsequently built and 11 years since an operating license was issued to operate one. That Watts Bar, Tenn., plant is still operating.

Still, several obstacles stand in the way of a nuclear revival in the United States, including the wariness of Wall Street.

expressed interest in constructing new reactors, in most cases on the sites of pre-existing nuclear power plants.

In December, North Carolina-based Progress Energy announced a tentative plan to build a nuclear power plant in Levy County, Fla., that would generate between 1,100 and 1,600 megawatts, enough to power at least 675,000 homes, said Progress spokesman Buddy Eller. Nuclear power is "one of our most economical forms of energy," Eller said. "We've seen tremendous growth here in Florida in recent years. Our obligation is to provide reliable and affordable energy that will meet the needs of our customers."

Additionally, he said, nuclear energy produces no greenhouse gases, an argument shared by the Nuclear Energy Institute, the industry's lobbying arm in Washington, which claims that the United States will need 45 percent more electricity by 2030 than it generates today. Constructing 50 new 1,000-megawatt reactors -- a 50 percent increase in the number of U.S.

Nuclear power plant construction "is incredibly capital-intensive, both the research and the construction of facilities," said Andrew Friendly, a venture capital investor with Advanced Technology Ventures in Boston, a company that helps fund cutting-edge energy technologies. "No one wants it in their backyard and we still haven't figured out what do with the waste."

On paper, nuclear power has always looked great. Since the 1950s, one of the industry's most effective boasts has been to point out how a few thimblefuls of uranium can generate as much energy as dozens of trainloads of coal, which is a major source of greenhouse gases. They also note that North America has abundant uranium, so nuclear power doesn't require reliance on foreign fuel.

But opponents will point out there is more to the nuclear industry than the nation's 100-plus operational atomic power plants scattered across the map. There is also a national infrastructure of rail lines and highway shippers whose job it

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Energy Department officials have considered a Northern Nevada route, known as the Mina corridor, as a promising path to the nuclear waste repository they want to build at Yucca Mountain, 100 miles northwest of Las Vegas.

Allen Benson, a Department of Energy spokesman for the Office of Repository Development in Las Vegas, said the tribe's decision means the Mina corridor will be nixed from the department's choices of potential rail lines to Yucca Mountain.

"Selecting Mina would appear to be academic at this time," Benson said late Tuesday. He said DOE will continue to include the Mina route in the impact statement expected to be released in October.

Elimination of the Mina corridor "certainly simplifies DOE's options," said David Blee, executive director of the U.S. Transport Council, a coalition of nuclear waste shippers.

It appeared that DOE's attention will be refocused on a 319-mile rail corridor to Yucca that originates at Caliente in Eastern Nevada.

To many analysts, the east-west Caliente corridor figures to be more expensive and more challenging from an engineering and construction standpoint than the 209-mile north-south Mina route that would run along old mining town rail beds at spots.

Under the Mina proposal, a base route would cross Northern Nevada on a Union Pacific rail, turn south at Winnemucca, pass east of Fernley, through the growing communities of Silver Springs and Wabuska, through the Walker River reservation and to Hawthorne.

Rail improvements and construction would proceed to Mina and near or through Tonopah and Goldfield, and south to the repository site near Amargosa Valley.

But Nevada officials who have fought against the Yucca repository stressed

Yucca passage

that nuclear waste from California likely would travel through Reno and Sparks, which sparked growing opposition locally.

Bob Loux, executive director of Nevada's Nuclear Projects Agency and a chief critic of the planned repository, said he was "actually pretty pleased" with the tribe's announcement.



"I know the Northern Nevada communities are relieved with the decision as well," Loux said in a telephone interview.

"This essentially would cut off use of the whole Mina corridor. I guess they're back to Caliente," Loux said.

Despite nuclear industry groups trying to persuade the tribe to participate in federal studies of the Mina corridor, Loux said the tribe probably "came to the conclusion there is no mileage with DOE, and nuclear waste transportation isn't as safe as everybody thinks."

Loux estimated the Energy Department spent hundreds of thousands of dollars in its effort to consider the Mina corridor as an option, including money spent on meetings, surveying and soil sampling.

The Walker River Paiutes for years had refused to allow the Energy

Department to study a rail route through their reservation.

But the tribe reconsidered its position a year ago. It began cooperating in DOE environmental studies that included relocating a portion of rail track away from the tribal community of Schurz.

Moving the rail line was a Paiute goal as a way to redirect U.S. Army shipments of high explosives headed to the Hawthorne Army Ammunition Depot.

Tribal chairman Williams said the Walker River Paiutes grew increasingly uncomfortable.

"The big factor was input from tribal members," she said. "There has been a lot of opposition and not a lot of education in the Northern Nevada area. It was an issue that none of our tribal members were comfortable with.

That was the biggest factor."

At the same time, the tribe in a statement said it has been approached by unidentified "business entities" with possible economic development ideas as alternatives to nuclear waste transport.

Williams declined to offer details of any proposals. She said tribal leaders plan to work with Sen. Harry Reid, D-Nev., to investigate its options.

Reid applauded the tribe's decision.

"I am so pleased that the Walker River Paiute Tribe has made the decision not to allow nuclear waste to be transported through their Reservation," he said in a statement.

"There are better ways to strengthen the economy in Nevada's rural and tribal communities, like investing in renewable energy sources, which alone could create more than 3,300 Nevada jobs," he said.

"The Tribe's decision is yet another blow to this (Yucca) project, which is on its last legs." Source: Las Vegas Review Journal. ■

Fresno a player.....

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is to ferry nuclear and spent fuel to and from reactors and to temporary storage sites.

If anything kills further nuclear reactor development in the United States, though, it's likely to be a problem that has haunted the entire nuclear age: nuclear waste.

In the 1970s, federal officials promised to take spent nuclear fuel off the utilities' hands and bury it somewhere. One possibility included burying it inside craters gouged in the Nevada desert by atom bomb tests.

Ultimately, the U.S. Energy Department came up with a plan to build a dump site 1,000 feet under Yucca Mountain in Nevada, a site surrounded by earthquake faults and dormant volcanoes. But ferocious opposition from Nevada residents and scientific uncertainties about the safety of the site have stalled the plan for years.

The death knell may have come in November when Democrats were handed control of Congress. Yucca Mountain is "dead right now," declared Sen. Harry Reid, D-Nev., shortly before his elevation to Senate majority leader.

For now, 50,000 tons of spent nuclear fuel and waste remain at 72 reactor sites across the country, including in dry cask containers at Diablo Canyon.

Ignoring California's ban on new nuclear power plants, a group of local businessmen in December unveiled tentative plans for Fresno Nuclear Energy Group LLC in collaboration with a Baltimore-based reactor construction firm.

Backers say that new, improved nuclear reactor designs will make the Fresno plant safer than its accident-prone predecessors. They believe the plant will provide not only abundant electricity to the fast-growing region and state, but also attract hundreds of jobs and generate hundreds of millions of dollars worth of tax revenues.

"Domestic violence in our area went up 60 percent in the last 10 years," said John Hutson, who until recently chaired the Fresno Utility Commission and is backing the plan. "Why is this? Lack of opportunities. When guys don't have jobs, they beat their wife and kids. ... All of these community-related problems can be addressed by creating opportunities (for jobs), and nothing creates opportunities like cheap electricity."

The business group has found favor with Assemblyman Chuck DeVore, R-Irvine (Orange County), who has introduced legislation to lift the ban. Few expect DeVore's bill to pass in a Democratically controlled Legislature in a state where environmentalism is strong.

New nuclear plants won't open for business in California, "and it's not because of any legal prohibitions," said Ralph Cavanagh of the Natural Resources Defense Council. "There's an abundance of better alternatives."

And for environmentalists, safety is still of paramount concern.

"What is Fresno thinking?" demanded longtime activist Rochelle Becker, executive director of the Alliance for Nuclear Responsibility in San Luis Obispo. "Nuclear power is not safe, cheap or insurable, and it leaves behind highly radioactive waste for our children, and their grandchildren and their grandchildren."

The state has begun a study into the future of nuclear power in California.

Assemblyman Sam Blakeslee, a San Luis Obispo Republican whose legislation created the study, said he is neither for nor against nuclear power, but prefers alternative energy sources, which are more forgiving when things go awry. "No one's suggesting that terrorists are going to fly aircraft into solar panels, or that if wind power doesn't live up to its hopes, it will result in a legacy of thousands of years of wastes," he said.

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Nuclear power.....

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Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.) and former Vice President Al Gore are among those who are

Yucca Mountain nuclear waste disposal site in his state.

And Philip E. Clapp, president of the National Environmental Trust, said he did not think subsidies could overcome the concerns of potential investors. "There isn't enough money in the federal till to change Wall Street's calculation of the financial risks," he said.

Even some lawmakers who support nuclear power question whether the industry needs more federal money.

Sen. Jeff Bingaman (D-N.M.), chairman of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, sees nuclear power as a "mature industry," said Bill Wicker, his spokesman. "Emerging climate-friendly and genuinely renewable technologies like wind and solar and geothermal and biomass could use that [funding] boost," Wicker said.

Some environmentalists remain steadfastly opposed to nuclear power.

"Investments in energy conservation and renewable energy are quicker, more cost-effective and sustainable ways to reduce global warming emissions," said Erich Pica of Friends of the Earth, which will oppose McCain's bill as long as it contains subsidies for nuclear power.

Such environmentalists also note that carbon emissions from nuclear fuel processing are significant. They say the costs and risks of nuclear power are too high and far greater than alternatives, such as solar and wind power. Source: Latimes.com

Fresno a player

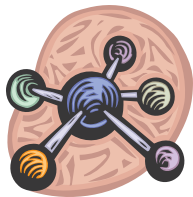
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Energy consultant Charles Cicchetti of Pacific Economics Group and the University of Southern California thinks future nuclear power could be cost-effective outside of California, especially with dramatic increases in oil prices.

As for California, though -- forget it. "California leads the nation in wind power and is approaching the lead in solar, and has geothermal resources that are among ... the biggest such sources in the world," Cicchetti said.

But Hutson, the nuclear backer in Fresno, sees nuclear energy as a solution for the Golden State.

"I would characterize myself as a liberal-left Democrat," he said. "The only thing I've got in common with the Bush administration is that we're both for nuclear." Source: Chronicle Science ■



Additional copies of this newsletter are available at the Mineral County Nuclear Projects Office located in the Mineral County Courthouse or you can obtain copies from the Mineral County Library. Copies can also be downloaded from the website at <http://www.mcnucprojects.com>. Questions and/or comments are welcome - Editor: Linda Mathias, Contributing Editor, format, graphics, Loreen Pitchford email qb4@gbis.com

DOE signs Yucca quality-assurance contract

WASHINGTON, April 6 (UPI) -- The U.S. Energy Department's nuclear waste office has awarded a \$1.3 million independent review of quality assurance at the Yucca Mountain Project.

Rockville, Md.-based InfoZen Inc. will review quality-assurance plans for the Office of Civilian Radioactive Waste Management, the main contractor of the Yucca Mountain Project, Bechtel SAIC Co., and national laboratories participating in the project, according to an OCRWM release.

Yucca Mountain has been designated as the sole repository of nuclear waste produced by U.S. plants and the military. It was supposed to open in 1998 but has been besieged by funding shortfalls, heavy opposition and scientific controversy. Its quality-assurance program has been faulted for unresponsive management and tamping down on those who raise flags.

InfoZen will also look at how the department implements quality-assurance plans and help improve them. OCRWM also signed a \$1.7 million contract with Hartsfield, Ga.-based Organizational Analysis Corp. to review the Yucca Mountain license application. OCRWM intends to submit the application to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission by June 2008.

"These independent assessments are critical to help me and senior managers determine how to fully address some of the process and organizational issues in these areas," said Ward Sproat, director of OCRWM. "These external reviews are intended to inform us about how and where we need to improve in these critical areas, and to ensure that we submit a high-quality license application."

This newsletter is a publication of the Mineral County Repository Planning and Oversight Program. Mineral County is one of ten affected units of local government involved in the proposed Yucca Mountain Repository.

Funding provided to Mineral County is paid by users of electricity generated by nuclear power plants. Under a general contract with nuclear generating utilities, the federal government collects a fee of one mill (one-tenth of a cent) per kilowatt-hour from utility companies for nuclear generated electricity. The money goes into the Nuclear Waste fund which is used to fund all program related activities.

These articles may not necessarily reflect the positions or opinions of the Mineral County Board of Commissioners.

For more information on Mineral County's program contact Linda Mathias, Director of Nuclear Projects at (775) 945-2484.

Additional information on the repository program can be obtained from the U.S. Department of Energy, Yucca Mountain, Site Characterization Project Office at (702) 794-1444 or contact them at www.ymp.gov, or the Nevada Agency for Nuclear Project, Nuclear Waste Project Office, Capital Complex, Carson City, Nevada 89570, (775) 687-3744 or visit them at their web site at www.state.nv.us/nucwaste.

