MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senate will now return to morning business.

YUCCA MOUNTAIN

Mr. REID. Madam President, I have been sparing in my comments the last several months about the Yucca Mountain situation. Everyone acknowledges that a Republican will bring this up in the next several weeks. We have had a series of people coming to the floor talking about nuclear waste. The Republican leader talked about it today. We have had Senator CRAIG and Senator MURKOWSKI speak about it several times this week.

My colleague from Alaska, for example, this morning discussed the issue of nuclear waste and transportation. I can remember Senator Bryan and I, when we had the pleasure of serving together in the Senate, traveled to St. Louis. The whole purpose of our trip was to meet with local officials about the transportation of nuclear waste. We did.

We went to the governing body of St. Louis. We talked to them. We had a very nice visit. We visited an editorial board. We were on a radio station or two there.

As a result, the people who run the city of St. Louis passed a resolution saying: We don't want nuclear waste transported through St. Louis.

If you can explain the issue to people, they recognize quickly it is not a good idea. So that is why I want to respond to some of the points raised by my friend from Alaska. He discussed, for example, the shipments of waste to the WIPP facility, the waste isolation project in New Mexico. Comparing those shipments to the proposed spent fuel shipment at Yucca is like comparing a squirt gun to the most modern tank in America. They are just completely different substances. The items being shipped to WIPP are things such as rags, tools, and laboratory equipment. These are not spent fuel rods, which would give you a lethal dose of radiation in less than 3 minutes if you stood near them. You could be exposed to it for a matter of seconds and get sick.

With the news of terrorists pursuing radioactive materials and weapons of mass destruction, now more than ever we need to be vigilant in protecting the welfare of the American people. The decision to approve or reject the Yucca Mountain site is the most important transportation decision of this new century. This decision could bring as much as 100,000 shipments of high-level nuclear waste by truck through our towns and communities, as many as 20,000 train loads. This year we learned they may ship some of it by barge - the most poisonous substance known to man — traveling by our schools, our homes, our churches, our places of business.

It doesn't make sense to ship this waste and allow terrorists to use any one of these shipments as the ultimate ''dirty'' bomb. A successful attack on a spent nuclear fuel shipping cask would be extremely dangerous. Each truck cask would contain up to 2 tons of deadly material and each rail cask up to 11 tons.

These casks are packed full of the most dangerous high-level nuclear waste known to man. They contain Cesium-137, Strontium-90, and Plutonium-239. A release of less than 1 percent will affect tens of thousands of citizens, resulting in hundreds of long-term cancer deaths. This could shut down an entire city.

My friend, Senator CONRAD, was told by an expert that a ''dirty'' bomb would make Washington, DC, uninhabitable for 400 years.

Spent fuel shipments to Yucca Mountain would create a target-rich environment. DOE would make daily shipments by barge, truck, and train, all going to the same place. There would be as many as six to eight shipments each day. There are very few targets now. There would be hundreds of targets, thousands of targets if we go forward. According to the NRC, there have only been at most one or two shipments per week in the entire country over the past 10 years. Current shipments are harder to attack because they go to many different destinations.

For the DOE to say ''we have never had an accident'' isn't true. If you pin them down, they will say we have had no ''reported'' releases. Again, DOE has proposed putting tens of thousands of these casks out on the roads, waterways, and railways without a transportation plan. It would not be as bad if they had a plan they had let the Congress and the American people scrub, and if they had done an environmental impact statement, but they have not even done that. They have not done an environmental assessment.

Don't take my word for it; look at what the Secretary of Energy said on the subject:

> The DOE is just beginning to formulate its preliminary thoughts about a transportation plan.

After 9–11, proceeding with Yucca Mountain without a transportation plan is reckless and irresponsible. The Congress has the responsibility to hold the Department accountable. That can only come from rejecting this reckless resolution.

I mentioned on the floor recently that there is a Web site which was started to educate the American people about these shipments. It is www.mapscience.org. Anybody within the sound of my voice, go to your computer and try this out. All you have to do is put in your address. It doesn't matter where it is in the United States. You put your address in and it will tell you where the nearest nuclear reactor is and where they are going to ship the waste—how close it will come to your home. We know that in at least 43 States, more than 60 million people will be within a mile of the possible routes. Everyone should try this Web site.

This Web site is telling the American people what the Department of Energy doesn't want them to know: These proposed shipments will go right by their homes, right by the places they work, right by the places where their kids go to school. There has been a big response from the American people. This Web site has been up for 10 days, and there have been well over 100,000 hits.

There is no rush to move forward. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission Chairman has stated that if this Yucca Mountain project did not go forward today, it would be no big deal. He said it can be kept safely on site for decades.

More important, Yucca Mountain will never eliminate the waste that is stored around the country. Everybody within the sound of my voice should understand the big lie the DOE and the nuclear power industry is projecting. The big lie is that the 131 sites where we have waste now will be reduced to one site. Well, the fact is, that will never happen. It will never happen because there are 46,000 tons there now. They can move 3,000 tons a year, but they produce 2,000 tons a year. So do the math. You will fill Yucca Mountain before it ever opens.

Remember, when you take out a spent fuel rod, 95 percent of the heat, the radioactivity is still in it. It is so hot the only thing they can do with it is stick it in water for 5 years to cool it off. After 5 years, they can put it into a dry cask storage container. So this statement that they will only have one site is not true. It is a big lie. There will always be 131 sites, plus Yucca Mountain, plus all the trucks and trains. So instead of having one site, we are going to have hundreds of thousands of sites.

So when my friends march down here and say this is nothing, it is like moving the stuff to New Mexico, I repeat my analogy of a squirt gun compared to the most modern tank in America; that is the comparison. The American people need to understand that the millions and millions of dollars spent by the nuclear power industry is money that has been spent to deceive and mislead the American people.

I hope my friends on the other side of the aisle will do the right thing and vote for the good of their constituents, not for the good of the big lobbying effort that has been conducted in Washington over the last 20 years, and not go the way of the many fundraisers or the way of the vacations that have been paid for by the Nuclear Energy Institute, where they send people to Las Vegas for a week so they can look at the hole in the mountain. I hope they will vote in their constituents' best interests.

Jim Hall is a member of the National Academy of Engineering Committee on Combating Terrorism and was Chairman of the National Transportation

Safety Board from 1994 to 2001. This article appeared in the New York Times the day before yesterday. Among other things, he said:

> Secretary Abraham has said there is plenty of time to create a transportation plan before Yucca Mountain begins receiving nuclear waste eight years from now. But safety issues will almost certainly get short shrift if they are not addressed before the repository site is approved. Congress needs to force the Department of Energy to reassess the dangers of transporting high-level nuclear waste and develop a secure plan before proceeding with the Yucca Mountain project.

RUSSIAN URANIUM AGREEMENT

Mr. BINGAMAN. Mr. President, both the Department of Energy and the Department of State have made important announcements this week relating to the so-called ''Russian HEU Agreement.'' This agreement is not widely known, but it is enormously important to our national security, and I would like to take this opportunity to call it to the attention of the Senate.

Under the HEU Agreement, the Russian Federation is converting 500 metric tons of highly enriched uranium from dismantled nuclear weapons into low-enriched uranium fuel for nuclear power plants. The United States then buys the low-enriched uranium for nuclear power plants in this country to use to generate electricity.

The benefits of this program, which is sometimes called the ''megatons to megawatts program,'' are obvious. Nuclear weapons scrapped under the program can never be used against us. Weapons-grade uranium blended down and consumed in power plants can never fall into the hands of terrorists or rogue states.

The United States and Russia entered into the HEU Agreement in 1993. The program will neutralize the equivalent of 20,000 nuclear warheads over its 20-year life. More than 150 metric tons of highly enriched uranium, the equivalent of nearly 6,000 nuclear warheads, have already been converted into low-enriched reactor fuel. Another 350 metric tons, the equivalent of 14,000 more warheads, are slated to be converted over the remaining 12 years.

Although the Russian HEU Agreement is a government-to-government agreement, it is being implemented for the Russian Federation by Tenex and for the United States by USEC Inc. USEC was originally established by the Energy Policy Act of 1992 to run the Department of Energy's uranium enrichment plants as a business. When the Russian HEU Agreement was first executed, USEC was wholly owned by the United States Government and it was tapped to implement the agreement as the Government's ''executive agent.'' In 1998, the Government sold USEC to private investors pursuant to the USEC Privatization Act, but retained the private company as its executive agent for the Russian HEU program.

Remarkably, USEC is able to conduct the Russian HEU program without cost to the Government. USEC pays the Russians for the uranium, and recovers its costs when it resells the uranium to nuclear utilities. The price paid by USEC was originally set in the HEU Agreement and has since been subject to negotiation between the parties.

Some time ago, USEC and Tenex reached an agreement on a new market-based mechanism for determining the price USEC will pay Russia for future deliveries. Yesterday, the State Department announced that the Governments of the United States and the Russian Federation have approved the new pricing mechanism.

The new pricing mechanism puts the program on a more commercial basis. It does away with the need for the two governments to renegotiate the price periodically. By basing the price on market conditions, the new mechanism provides a more stable and predictable procedure for determining future prices and should help ensure the long-term success of the program.

In addition, this past Tuesday, the Department of Energy announced that it had signed an agreement with USEC that resolves a number of issues between them. Earlier, there had been talk of the Government replacing USEC as its executive agent under the Russian HEU deal or appointing multiple agents. Under the accord announced on Tuesday, the Department of Energy agreed to recommend that USEC continue to serve as the Government's sole executive agent, and USEC committed to meeting the annual delivery schedules in the Russian HEU agreement over the remaining years of the agreement.

The Russian HEU Agreement serves us well. Each Russian warhead that is dismantled and each ton of weapons-grade uranium that is converted to commercial reactor fuel reduces the risk of nuclear proliferation and enhances our security. USEC has made great progress implementing the program over the past 8 years. The two announcements made this week give us hope for further progress in the years ahead.

THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN COLOMBIA

Mr. FEINGOLD. Madam President, I wish to take this opportunity to express my support for the Colombian people following the Presidential election in Colombia on May 26. I was pleased to cosponsor a resolution last week welcoming the successful completion of democratic elections in Colombia. It is a tribute to the Colombian people that despite significant threats and violence, both international and national election observers found the elections to be free and fair.

I am also pleased that the President-elect of Colombia, Alvaro Uribe Velez, has been in Washington this week to discuss U.S. support for counter-narcotics operations. The United States has already invested heavily in a unified effort to reduce the flow of drugs from Colombia, while simultaneously promoting human rights and economic development throughout the country. It is essential that we build on that investment during the new administration of President-elect Uribe. Indeed, I am pleased that President-elect Uribe has said that he looks forward to the day when Colombia is not sending a single kilogram of cocaine to the United States. To make that a reality, we must ensure that coca growers in the poor regions of Colombia have access to alternative economic opportunities, and that they take advantage of those opportunities to get out of the coca business for good. We must also promote human rights and the rule of law in Colombia; otherwise, the cycle of violence and narco-trafficking that is draining the livelihood of the country will ultimately lead to total state collapse, and to even more narco-trafficking and perhaps support for terrorism in the ruins of such a failed state.

With the visit to Washington this week of a new President-elect, this is an opportune time to reflect on some of the new directions in our bilateral relationship with Colombia. In particular, this provides an appropriate opportunity to step back and evaluate the effectiveness to date of our various policy objectives in Colombia. We must consider, for example, whether our initiatives have been effective in reducing the levels of violence in the country, in seeking accountability for grave human rights violations, and in cutting off the narco-traffickers who provide both financing and incentives for insurgent forces. We must also ask whether our policy in Colombia provides an effective balance of military assistance and well-managed development support. And we have an obligation to the people of Colombia to consider the human and environmental effects of our ongoing fumigation campaign.

In reflecting on the situation in Colombia today, one thing remains absolutely clear: The status quo in Colombia cannot be justified. The prolonged civil war, which is fueled by lucrative narco-trafficking, has created a volatile society, with untold suffering and a seemingly endless cycle of grave human rights abuses. The narco-traffickers have prospered, the guerrillas, and increasingly the paramilitaries, have offered the narco-traffickers hired protection, and they, too, are prospering from this deadly relationship. It is the people of Colombia, the average farmers and the honest citizens, who must pay the price of the war. That price can be counted in the number of lives lost or displaced in Colombia. But we must also count the lives lost to drugs and violence on our own streets in the United States. Such vast costs are wholly unacceptable.

So, where do we go from here? First and foremost, we must continue to scrutinize the relationship between the