

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that there now be a period of morning business with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

NUCLEAR WASTE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I hope everyone recognizes the tremendous tragedy we sadly heard of yesterday in Baltimore. A train derailed in a tunnel. The fire is still burning. The hydrochloric acid is still leaking from that tank. Last night, the city of Baltimore, one of the largest cities in America, was closed down. The Baltimore Orioles were in the middle of a doubleheader. They stopped the game and sent everybody home.

The reason I mention this is there has been a mad clamor about the nuclear power industry and shipping nuclear waste. The nuclear industry doesn't care where it goes, although they are focused on Nevada for the present time. I think everyone needs to recognize that transporting hazardous materials is very difficult. If people think hydrochloric acid is bad—which it is—think about how bad nuclear waste is. A speck the size of a pinpoint would kill a person. We are talking about transporting some 70,000 tons of it all across America.

I hope before everybody starts flexing their muscles about the reestablishment of nuclear power in this country that we recognize first there has to be something done with the dangerous waste associated with nuclear power.

It is estimated that some 60 million people live within a mile of the routes that may be proposed for transporting this nuclear waste by train or truck. Not to mention the problems related to terrorism, which we have discussed at some length on this floor in previous debates.

We should leave nuclear waste where it is. Eminent scientists say it is safe. It could be stored onsite in storage containers for a fraction of the cost of a permanent repository. It would be much less dangerous. It could be stored relatively safely for 100 years, the scientists say. During that period of time, we might develop a breakthrough idea as to what could be done safely with these spent fuel rods.

RADIATION EXPOSURE CLAIMS

Mr. DOMENICI. Mr. President, I would like to speak today about a group of Americans, some of whom are in my State. Some are in Arizona. Some are in Wyoming. Some are in Connecticut. These people have only one thing in common: they are the beneficiaries of an American law that is called RCRA, the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act. A number of us were part of getting that law passed. It was a recognition that there were certain Americans, including uranium miners and some others, who very well might have been overexposed to low-level radiation when they were mining in uranium mines that weren't aerated—where they did not have enough air conditioning and not enough clean air. They may have very well during their lives breathed in radiation and contracted serious illnesses. Some might have died. Some may today be suffering from cancer or other diseases.

In any event, this law was passed. It was kind of heralded as a very good commitment by the Government and very simple. You didn't have to get a lawyer for these claims. It was limited to \$100,000 in exchange for making it simple and setting some standards: You can come in and prove your case. You could probably prove your claim in a relatively short period of time.

Lo and behold, if Congress put the money up, you would get your check. You could get it as a widow. You could get it as one who was sick. You could get it as anyone entitled to it under the statute. It worked pretty well for a while.

Then something very ghastly happened for the beneficiaries. Pretty soon, they started going to the Justice Department which has charge of these claims and asking them for money.

The Justice Department told this growing group of Americans: We don't have any money.

They said: What do you mean? Here is the law.

They said: Well, Congress didn't put up the money. We ran out. So you will not be worried, why don't we give you an IOU. Here is your assurance that the Government says it owes you \$100,000.

These people started coming to see their Senators—not only me but Senator BINGAMAN and other Senators—saying, time is passing. I am getting sicker. I may even die, and I have an IOU from this great big American Government. Why can't they pay me?

Let me say in this Chamber that it is embarrassing to say it even here, but it is more embarrassing to say it to the victims. There is a big series of discussions going on between committees—even appropriations subcommittees—as to which one ought to appropriate the money.

In the meantime, no money is appropriated. People walk around with the IOUs filing their claims, and they are

working on them day by day. And another law passes. It is for a larger group of Americans who come in to adjudicate their claims for exposure to low-level radiation. It is for radiation where we had uranium in a Richmond, VA, mine or perhaps in Paducah, KY, and various places in Ohio. For this larger group of people, those claims are still being worked.

We say: Well, time has passed, and maybe these claims should be a little higher. So they are awarded \$150,000 if they can prove the claim that they are either totally disabled or are an heir.

Congress in that case—coming out of a different committee—made that program an entitlement. Even the occupant of the Chair, who is a new Senator, would understand that those claims are paid without anybody appropriating it—just like the Social Security check or your veterans check.

Here is one group of Americans filing their claims. Some of them are already adjudicated; we stamp out a check, while over here another group of Americans carry around IOUs.

A number of Senators have been working on this issue. A number of House Members have been working on it. My friend, Senator BINGAMAN, has been working on it.

But essentially our last opportunity to cease the embarrassment and do something half fair was to put language in the supplemental appropriations bill that would see to it that for any claims already finished where people are carrying around the IOUs, or any that are completed for the rest of this year, there is money for them. We provided that in the Senate bill on supplemental appropriations.

Frankly, we even had to find a way to pay for it because it had to be budget neutral. So we found a way to pay for it. I did, out of a program I started a few years ago. I said: It is not being used, so cancel it so we have room.

Today, at about 10:30, 11 o'clock this morning, after a number of days of conferring, the House-Senate committee on that bill approved it. It should come back before us very soon and get approval. It has language in it that says whatever amount of money is needed for those holding those IOUs and for those finishing up their claims by the end of this fiscal year, they will have the money in the Justice Department to pay it.

I say to the Senate, I know it is difficult, unless you have this problem, for you to be as concerned as I or those in my particular region. But I thought maybe I should tell the whole Senate because it is time they know that this is a festering embarrassment.

Is it solved? No. The appropriations bill that is going to put in money for next year only carries a small amount of money because it expects, as does the President in his budget, to convert this program to an automatic payment