Space commercialization holds great promise for the development of new drugs, ultrapure materials with incredible properties, and even space tourism. To make space commercialization a reality, the US needs to support the growth of its domestic commercial space launch facilities or "spaceports." It's a sad state of affairs, but US satellite manufacturers are facing increasing pressure to use foreign launch services due to a lack of a sufficient domestic launch capability.

The purpose of the Spaceport Equality Act is to ensure a strong U.S. launch capability. This act will provide tax exempt status for spaceport facility bonds, just like we do for publicly-owned airports and seaports. The government will not be directly funding the commercial space transportation business, but it will be creating the conditions necessary to stimulate private sector capital investment in these spaceports. Coupled with the development of "reusable launch vehicles," these spaceports will be "aero-space ports" that will accommodate both air and space vehicles. Reusable launch vehicles are essential to reduce the cost of access to space by a factor of 10 to 100 from its present level of $20,000/pound.

My home State of Nevada has an important role to play in space commercialization. As part of NASA's Space Launch Initiative, a public-private team will use the Nevada Test Site for orbital flights. This sets the stage for commercial space operations in Nevada as early as 2003-4.

The Spaceport Equality Act simply puts spaceports on equal footing with airports by treating them the same for purposes of exempt facility bond rules. I urge my colleagues to support this legislation which is central to opening the door for potential commercial civil exploration and commercial development.

Mr. LUGAR. Madam President, earlier this month, the United States and the country of Kazakhstan successfully completed one of the most ambitious nonproliferation projects undertaken in history—the securing of one of the world's largest stockpiles of weapons-grade plutonium under the auspices of the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction program. The closure of the Aktau plutonium factory in Almaty, then the capital of Kazakhstan, has returned to the United States approximately 3,000 15-foot cylinders, called fuel assemblies, containing spent nuclear fuel.

The packing is designed to last 50 years, but U.S. security officials say the plutonium could be extracted from the assemblies with relative ease, according to the Energy Department. The plutonium had been intended to be used as fuel in other reactors like it, but only one, the BN-600, was ever built. Located near Yekaterinburg on the eastern slope of the Ural Mountains, near the city of Aktan, it was used to make little or no plutonium from the BN-350, but the material just piled up.

The plant closed in 1999, at the end of its useful life. After 26 years of providing electricity and water (by powering a desalination plant) to the Aktan region, the plant had an accumulation of 3,000 15-foot cylinders, called fuel assemblies, containing spent nuclear fuel.

About 2,750 pounds of weapons-grade plutonium could be extricated from the assemblies with relative ease, according to the Energy Department. Nearly half the assemblies emitted little radiation and could be safely handled by workers wearing protective clothing. The other half were too "hot" to be handled by anything but robots, which are far too heavy to be handled by anything but a large robot, and all of them now emit lethal doses of radiation.

Last month, after nearly three years and $43 million in U.S. support, the 478th and last canister was welded shut and lowered into the cooling pond.

At the plant, Mr. Crane said, there are now manned gates, closed-circuit TV cameras, X-ray machines and turnstiles with magnetic cards, along with sensors that monitor the nuclear materials around the clock.

The packing is designed to last 50 years, but the plutonium isn't destined to stay at the closed Aktan plant that long. Eventually, under a decree signed six months ago by Mr. Nazarbayev, the canisters will be taken 2,750 miles by train to the former nuclear-testing grounds at Semipalatinsk, on the other side of the Caspian coastline, and turned to the cooling pond.

"There, sios will be dug into the steppe and the fat cylinders will be buried, using a technique perfected in the United States. It will be the longest railroad shipment of plutonium ever attempted," said Miss Dedik. "They will have to design special transport casks."

And since the rail line wanders through what is now Russia and Kyrgyzstan, special loops will have to be built so that the plutonium can move in Kazakhstan during its whole voyage.

CONTROLLING THE PROLIFERATION OF SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Madam President, last week I came to the floor to express...