

2302 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-3102
(202) 225-2365

COMMITTEE ON
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Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

JOE SKEEN
2d DISTRICT, NEW MEXICO

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RECEIVED

DISTRICT OFFICES:
FEDERAL BUILDING
ROSWELL, NM 88201
(505) 622-0055

1065-B SOUTH MAIN
SUITE A
LAS CRUCES, NM 88005
(505) 527-1771

SUZANNE EISOLD
CHIEF OF STAFF

March 6, 1997

The Honorable Gary Johnson
Governor of the State of New Mexico
State Capitol Building
Sante Fe, New Mexico 87503

Dear *Gary* Governor Johnson:

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OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
SANTA FE, NM
Jan 10 9 26 AM '97

It has been called to my attention by a New Mexico legislator that the State probably will not issue a Resource Conservation and Recovery Act permit for the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant until March, 1998. This certainly would not be in keeping with the schedule as outlined by Congress.

My intent, and that of my colleagues, in passing the WIPP Land Withdrawal Act Amendment of 1996, was to establish an aggressive yet attainable permitting schedule that ensures the WIPP will open in November, 1997. I encourage the New Mexico Environment Department to stay abreast of this impending milestone for issuing the WIPP RCRA permit.

The DOE submitted its Compliance Certification Application to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in October, 1996. Congress expects the EPA to complete its review of this 84,000-page document by October, 1997. The State Environment Department has ample time to complete its review of Part B of the application -- 21 months to date. New Mexico has the opportunity to lead the nation in responsible permitting, "provided all applicable health and safety standards have been met and all laws complied with," as I stated in the Amendment.

Good planning and communication should eliminate any delays in the permitting process. After all, RCRA's ultimate goal is protection of human health and the environment. With the projected opening of the WIPP in November of this year, we can help ensure this goal is not compromised.

Sincerely,


JOE SKEEN
Member of Congress

JS:jr

cc: Secretary Mark E. Weidler
Senator Pete V. Domenici

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