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March 15, 1999 Congressional Record (from /thomas.loc.gov)

By Mr. MURKOWSKI (for himself, Mr. Craig, Mr. Grams, and Mr. Crapo):

S. 608. A bill to amend the Nuclear Waste Policy Act of 1982; to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

NUCLEAR WASTE POLICY ACT OF 1999

Mr. CRAIG. Mr. President, I come to the floor today with my colleague, Senator Frank Murkowski of Alaska, chairman of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, and Senator Rod Grams to introduce the Nuclear Waste Policy Act of 1999.

Once again, Congress must clarify its intention toward the disposal of spent nuclear fuel and nuclear waste. It is for this reason that I introduced the Nuclear Waste Policy Act of 1997, which passed with broad bipartisan support in this body last year, as did similar legislation in the other body. It is why I am an original cosponsor of the legislation this year.

We must resolve the problem that this Nation faces with disposing of nuclear materials. Congress must recognize its responsibility to set a clear and definitive nuclear material disposal policy. With the passage of this legislation in the last Congress, the Senate expressed its will that Government fulfill its responsibilities. This legislation makes one significant change to the course we are currently on by directing that an interim storage facility for nuclear materials be constructed at area 25 at the Nevada test site and that the interim facility be prepared to accept nuclear materials by June 30, 2003.

The President and the Vice President do not support this provision. They do not support an interim storage facility at one safe, secure location in the Nevada desert. What they do support, according to Energy Secretary Bill Richardson, is an interim storage at 70 some sites spread across this Nation. They support storage near population centers and major bodies of water, but not at a site located right next to a permanent repository, a site where hundreds of nuclear explosions have already been detonated over the last 50 years.

In an announcement last month, the administration proposes to federalize storage of spent fuel at commercial reactors around this country by having the Government come in and take responsibility for each site. But do not worry, folks, because they promise to come and pick up the waste eventually, or at least that is what they have been promising for a long, long while. Well, I have some experience with the DOE and its promises, as many of my colleagues have, especially in the area of nuclear waste over the last number of years.

In 1995, the Secretary of Energy promised the State of Idaho, and signed a court enforceable agreement, that transuranic waste in Idaho would be headed out of the State to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant no later than next month. Now DOE says they can't meet that deadline. Why? The Environmental Protection Agency has said that the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant is safe and ready to receive waste, but the State of New Mexico won't issue a permit for the disposal and that the court won't lift its injunction.

Now, I do believe our Secretary of Energy is trying in good faith to honor his commitment to the State of Idaho in moving that waste, but, once again, on issues of this kind of political sensitivity, our Government has shown no willingness to lead on this issue, and this administration is the prime example of a government without leadership.

I know something about the politics of nuclear waste. I know something about DOE's broken promises. I mentioned the example of WIPP as a misuse of environmental regulation to subvert the will of Congress. It is this kind of game playing that we must eliminate.

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