

The nuke storage debate

Written by Gallupsun Staff
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Editor,

Lea and Eddy Counties in southeast New Mexico are over 450 miles from McKinley County, but in this digital age news travels in the blink of an eye. As I have learned with all things nuclear in New Mexico, there is always a lot of fear and misinformation, so I'm not surprised by Mr. [Mervyn] Tilden's comments regarding the proposed Holtec's HI-STORE Consolidated Interim Storage Facility (CISF), but some of his facts surrounding the project need clarification.

First, I would point out that the project is strongly supported with resolutions from Eddy and Lea County Commissioners, as well as the elected Councilors and Commissioners in Carlsbad and Hobbs. This region of the state has a high nuclear IQ thanks to the robust scientific workforce at the WIPP facility near Carlsbad and URENCO plant in Eunice. We would not approve of any project that would harm our regional economy or environment, either here or the entire state.

The Eddy-Lea Energy Alliance (ELEA) which consists of Carlsbad, Hobbs, Eddy and Lea Counties was formed for joint economic development efforts. We chose this project because of President Obama's Blue-Ribbon Commission on America's Nuclear Future strongly recommended Consolidated Interim Storage to temporarily handle our country's nuclear waste issue. ELEA issued a Request for Proposal (RFP) and Holtec International was the outright winner. Holtec has the safest, most robust system, their transport cask is the heaviest and most robust, their company leadership is very strong. They are highly research oriented and they have experience with storing 60% of spent nuclear fuel in the United States.

We also do not yet know what the transportation routes the fuel will take to reach the proposed facility will be. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Department of Transportation and Federal Rail Administration will make the route determinations and will choose the best rail and safest routes to the destination. Those routes will be carefully inspected to meet standards and improvements will be made if necessary.

There have been over 1,300 used fuel transports by utilities in the country without any incident. The U.S. Navy transports nuclear fuel across the country to Idaho without incident. Thousands of warheads have been shipped between Albuquerque and Pantex without incident and clearly, one must realize nuclear materials have been transported in and out of Los Alamos for decades. As for WIPP, there have been over 12,000 shipments traveling over 15 million loaded

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miles (moon and back 28 times) without a release. This is a very safe and closely monitored process using a transport cask that is virtually indestructible.

We understand the concerns of McKinley County's Native American communities

regarding the uranium mining legacy. It is justified and should be addressed. We do not intend to add to that legacy and will make every effort to consult with the Navajo leadership and local governments as we continue our outreach program throughout New Mexico.

The proposed project is a solution to the many years of neglect of our nation's nuclear waste issue. But it is not the final solution. ELEA agrees that the nation needs a permanent repository for spent nuclear fuel from the many existing power plants and soon to be decommissioned facilities. Until that time, the proposed project will be a benefit to the nation and to New Mexico.

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