

Freudenthal fights waste plan

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SALT LAKE CITY -- The governor of Wyoming has joined officials from the Southeast in opposing a plan to import about 20,000 tons of nuclear waste from Italy for processing in Tennessee and disposal in Utah.

Gov. Dave Freudenthal told the chairman of the U.S. House Committee on Science and Technology that there's no reason the United States should accept the waste.

"We have sufficient problems now with finding storage space in this country for this material, and that is a problem that is likely to become more critical in the future as we may be forced to rely more upon nuclear energy in the future," Freudenthal said in a Feb. 7 letter.

"I simply cannot conceive of any reason we should use up space in a finite storage facility -- so hard to come by in this country -- so that Italy does not have to find its own solution to this problem," he told Rep. Bart Gordon, D-Tenn., another opponent.

Freudenthal, a Democrat, also sent his letter to Wyoming's congressional delegation.

The waste would enter the country through Southern ports, and a portion would eventually be sent to Clive, Utah, 70 miles west of Salt Lake City, after processing.

The landfill is owned by EnergySolutions Inc., which describes itself as the largest handler of radioactive waste in the U.S. The company's application to import the waste is pending before the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

The NRC, which is seeking public comment through mid-March, has asked for the opinion of the 11-state Northwest Interstate Compact on Low-Level Radioactive Waste Management. Wyoming and Utah are members.

Gordon is urging the compact to oppose the waste plan.

"It would say to the world that the United States is open for business and will take the world's low-level radioactive waste until our facilities are filled, regardless of the needs of our own country," the congressman said in a Feb. 1 letter.

Utah Gov. Jon Huntsman, a Republican, has said an agreement with EnergySolutions prevents him from trying to block foreign waste, as long as it meets the state's radioactivity limits and fits within the mile-square disposal site.

A message left with Huntsman's spokeswoman was not immediately returned Wednesday.

Some Republican and Democratic lawmakers in South Carolina are opposing the arrival of Italian waste because there's a chance it could be shipped through the port at Charleston.

A message left with an EnergySolutions spokesman was not immediately returned Wednesday. The company has said its processing facility in Oak Ridge, Tenn., has recycled foreign radioactive waste since 1996.

A group opposed to additional waste in Utah praised Freudenthal and called on Utah officials to join him.

"The governor of Wyoming is adding his voice to the national consensus that the U.S. needs to first take care of our own domestic nuclear waste disposal before we can even consider taking waste from other countries," said Vanessa Pierce, director of the Healthy Environment Alliance of Utah, known as HEAL.