

# Utah gov opposes nuke waste import

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SALT LAKE CITY -- Gov. Jon Huntsman said Wednesday he will block the shipment of Italian nuclear waste to Utah, reversing his earlier position that foreign waste should be an issue decided by the federal government.

EnergySolutions Inc. has an application pending before the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission to import 20,000 tons of low-level radioactive waste through Southern ports for processing in Tennessee.

After processing, about 8 percent, or some 1,600 tons, would be shipped to the company's dump in the west Utah desert, about 70 miles west of Salt Lake City.

"We applaud Gov. Huntsman for once again proving to be a man of his word and representing the people of Utah," said Vanessa Pierce, executive director of Healthy Environment Alliance of Utah.

"This is a clear case where the governor has put the public interest ahead of special interests," she said.

Pierce had been critical of the Republican governor for saying the issue was a federal one while other politicians, including Democratic Gov. Dave Freudenthal of Wyoming and members of Congress, came out in opposition.

Huntsman said he directed Utah's representative on the Northwest Interstate Low-Level Waste Compact to vote against allowing the waste into Utah.

The NRC can approve the application, but the multistate group can keep the waste from coming here. Under the group's rules, a state that would get the foreign waste can veto it.

"As I have always emphatically declared, Utah should not be the world's dumping ground," Huntsman said in a statement.

"Our country has limited space to store even domestic waste and it would be most appropriate to have a federal policy against the importation of foreign nuclear waste. However, as the federal government is slow to adopt such a policy, Utah will lead the way," he said.

There was no immediate comment from Utah-based EnergySolutions.

EnergySolutions' application at the NRC has drawn more than 1,000 public comments, an unprecedented number for a license request. Since March, a Utah environmental group has been sending about 100 letters a week to Huntsman's office opposing the plan.

South Carolina lawmakers are considering a resolution opposing the waste because it could be shipped through the port at Charleston.

There is a bill in Congress to ban foreign nuclear-waste imports unless they originate in the U.S. or come from an overseas military facility.

EnergySolutions contends that a law isn't necessary and that the NRC has the technical expertise to decide if the waste can be safely handled.

The company over three years has been increasing its campaign contributions to key members of Congress by hundreds of thousands of dollars as well as its spending by lobbyists.

One of the company's former lobbyists is U.S. Rep. Rob Bishop, R-Utah, whose district includes the Utah dump site. He has said Congress shouldn't meddle in the affairs of a state when it comes to handling foreign waste.

Before his about-face, Huntsman had said he only was concerned about the volume of waste in Clive, Utah, not its origin. He repeatedly said the issue of whether foreign waste should be allowed into the U.S. was a federal one.

Huntsman also had been uncertain if he had the power to block the waste because of an earlier agreement with the company.