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3 MS. WALKER: My name is Sarah, with an H,  
4 Walker. One of the reasons I'm commenting on the upcoming  
5 site recommendations for Yucca Mountain is that I have  
6 somewhat of a personal stake in the outcome. As a fourth  
7 generation Nevadan, I have no desire to see the place I  
8 love condemned as a future wasteland. But I also believe  
9 that, having been burned by DOE in the past, the residents  
10 of this state have a responsibility to not let the federal  
11 government make a disastrous mistake to impact the entire  
12 country.

13 It's easy to make the argument that the waste  
14 should be buried somewhere other than Nevada. For  
15 instance the residents of this state have never had the  
16 privilege of the benefits associated with nuclear power,  
17 and we have already had to deal with the disproportionate  
18 amount of consequences of the federal governments previous  
19 nuclear experience.

20 My own grandmother, who was born and raised in  
21 Ely, is currently undergoing treatment for cancer caused  
22 by exposure to radioactive fallout from atmospheric  
23 testing in the 1950s. And the DOE wonders why people have  
24 so the little trust in them.

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1 But even discounting the unfairness of the  
2 situation, the scientific evidence collected so far  
3 doesn't really recommend Yucca Mountain as a safe place to  
4 bury such highly toxic waste in the first place. Possible  
5 earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, unpredictable water flow?  
6 And after 20 years, all of a sudden the DOE admitting that  
7 the geologic features of the mountain won't contain the  
8 waste for long enough so engineered barriers will have to  
9 designed to last for 10,000 years.

10 What about after ten thousand years, if the  
11 waste is even contained that long? Peak dosages of  
12 radiation escaping from the repository won't occur until  
13 sometime between 200,000 to 800,000 years in the future.  
14 But then again, how can we even consider these issues and  
15 make a decision on the suitability of the Yucca Mountain  
16 when the final Environmental Impact Statement hasn't even  
17 been finished? When thermal testing isn't scheduled to be  
18 completed until 20005 and the final site suitability  
19 guidelines that will dictate the criteria Yucca Mountain  
20 must fit into don't even exist yet?

21 Yucca Mountain doesn't seem like a safe bet to  
22 me. That's what the all these site characterization

23 studies and viability assessments have amounted to, a huge

24 Vegas-style wager.

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1 And if DOE loses, Nevadans will have to pay the

2 prices with their land and quality of environment and

3 possibly even their lives.

4 It isn't difficult at all to make a valid

5 argument against sticking the stuff in the southern

6 Nevada. But it is more than a Nimby issue. I think that

7 an equality important argument to make here is that

8 irretrievably burying the country's nuclear waste in the

9 ground anywhere, whether it be here or Alaska or Texas or

10 wherever, is not a good idea.

11 10,000 years is twice the length of recorded

12 history. How can we be so presumptuous as to believe that

13 we can engineer our way around eons of natural evolution?

14 How can we capriciously gamble with the health and safety

15 of our future generations? The sociological and

16 environmental consequences of such an undertaking will be

17 far beyond our most imaginative predictions.

18 DOE may be busy with their minute calculations

19 about water flow and the thermal properties of volcanic

20 tuff, but what they are fundamentally doing is taking a

21 gigantic leap of faith that I am not prepared to endorse.

22       There are, and will be, I believe other

23 solutions, and better solutions. Transmutation has

24 already presented itself as a partial alternative to waste

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1 burial. For those officials claiming it is not

2 economically feasible, please explain how spending \$60

3 billion on a permanent hole in the ground is. And for

4 those who claim it's not safe, consult the many other

5 countries in the world that have been reprocessing their

6 nuclear waste without incident for quite some time.

7       We have only been splitting atoms for maybe 70

8 years. A century ago the potential of nuclear energy

9 could hardly be conceived of. What will another 100 years

10 bring?

11       I believe that the best plan is not to use

12 science in the service of shortsighted political and

13 economic goals, but rather to trust in science's

14 inevitable advancement and the infinite creativity of the

15 human mind. Knowing that we were able to discover and

16 harness the power of the atom in the first place, we

17 should trust that in another hundred years, if given

18 adequate incentive, science will provide a better solution

19 than the out-of-sight out-of-mind objective that the  
20 government is currently pursuing.

21 In the meantime, the nuclear waste can remain  
22 safely where it is, onsite at the reactor facilities that  
23 produce it, instead of being hauled through our towns and  
24 cities.

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1 I urge the DOE to reconsider its plans to bury  
2 nuclear waste in Yucca Mountain. Putting the lives of  
3 Nevadans and the millions of people along the  
4 transportation routes at risk is too big a price to pay  
5 for such a precarious solution to this problem. We have  
6 the benefit of time. The waste will be radioactive for  
7 tens of thousands of years. Let's use it to our advantage  
8 and start looking into safer, more efficient and publicly  
9 acceptable alternatives to the burial of nuclear waste.  
10 Thank you.