



Matheson Speaks

by Shawn Mansell
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Matheson at UVSC

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Congressman Jim Matheson railed against all things nuclear on Monday.

Matheson expressed his dissatisfaction with the proposal to relocate nuclear waste from the eastern U.S. to the Goshute Reservation in Tooele County. Placing the waste in Utah "would have a chilling effect on economic development," he said.

The lone Democrat in Utah's delegation, Matheson added that he would work in a bipartisan fashion to resist making the Beehive State a holding ground for spent nuclear fuel.

"[Huntsman] is trying to do everything he can to stop this," Matheson said of the Governor's efforts to influence decision makers in Washington. "That is very helpful."

The Congressman said there are three factors that could prevent the fuel from being stored within Utah's boundaries.

The federal Interior Secretary Gale Norton could, according to Matheson, nix the planned storage. "The Secretary for the interior has to as trustee for the tribe has to sign off on the lease," he said. "With one administrative act she could stop it."

He also said that the Bureau of Land Management has to approve "rail spurs" to be built on BLMN land to bring the waste into the reservation. If the Bureau balks at the construction it would effectively kill the project. Matheson doesn't think this scenario is likely. "The Bureau of Land Management is under the jurisdiction of the secretary of the Interior. If she has already signed off on a release for the Indian reservation I think it's doubtful the Bureau of Land Management is going to stop the rail spur."

A third option, Matheson explained, would involve congress passing a bill that would change federal land adjacent to the proposed storage site and have it designated as wilderness. "We tried and it didn't get through last congress, we'll try it again but that is going to be a tougher one to make happen."

The third term representative from Utah's second congressional district isn't overly optimistic that the waste can be kept out of Skull Valley. "It seems to be moving forward in a direction that's very disturbing to me."

Matheson also voiced opposition to the possible resumption of nuclear weapons testing.

Speaking of previous nuclear weapons tests Matheson said, "Between 1951 and 1992 about a thousand tests took place at the Nevada test site and the government told everyone it was safe and that they should support this."

"It turns out the government lied to us when they told us it was safe," Matheson said.

Cancer related to radiation fallout exposure cost many in Southern Utah their lives he said. "It's difficult for me to imagine why we would want to go down this path again."

Matheson introduced legislation to restrict the nuclear tests. "It's going to be tough to get this legislation passed because there are a lot of forces out there who want to move ahead with developing new nuclear weapons."

He was heartened by the fact that Senator Bennett has put forth similar legislation in the Senate. "We've got a good effort in the House and Senate in a bipartisan way and that's the way you get things done in Washington."

Monday's event was sponsored the Center For the Study of Ethics, with support from the Distance Education Department. Matheson's appearance on campus was his first since his election to the House of Representatives.

