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Contact:
Sue Walitsky (Cardin) (202) 224-4524
Lee Pitts (Alexander) (202) 224-8816

Cardin, Alexander Seek Ban on Importation of Foreign-Generated Nuclear Waste

WASHINGTON – U.S. Senators **Benjamin Cardin (D-Md.)** and **Lamar Alexander (R-Tenn.)**, both members of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, today announced they will introduce legislation to ban the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) from authorizing importation of certain low-level foreign-generated nuclear waste.

“The proper management of low level radioactive waste is in the nation’s best interest,” **Cardin said**. “Reserving the capacity at the Utah site for waste generated in our own country, before we import waste from other countries, makes good common sense and good public policy.”

“There is no reason to take in the world’s low-level nuclear waste when we have not figured out what to do with our own,” **Alexander said**. “I agree with Congressman Gordon that the United States shouldn’t become the world’s nuclear garbage dump. I commend Congressman Gordon for his leadership on this issue in the House of Representatives, and look forward to moving this legislation forward in a bipartisan manner.”

Cardin and Alexander are sponsoring a Senate version of legislation introduced in the House of Representatives by Congressmen Bart Gordon (D-Tenn.) and Ed Whitfield (R-Ky.). The bill would prohibit the importation of nuclear waste unless the material originated within the United States. The president could grant specific exemptions only if the importation would serve an important national or international policy goal, such as a research purpose.

The issue of imported nuclear waste has attracted attention recently because of a Utah-based company’s application to import 20,000 tons of waste from decommissioned nuclear reactors in Italy. According to its application with the NRC, EnergySolutions would process the waste at its facility in Oak Ridge, Tennessee and dispose of it at a site in Clive, Utah.

EnergySolutions disposes of more than 90 percent of the low-level radioactive waste generated in the United States through a license granted by the State of Utah and with the permission of the Northwest Interstate Compact on Low-level Radioactive Waste Management -- a regional regulatory body consisting of eight states, including Utah. Federal regulations require the approval of the state and the compact in which the disposal site is located.

In this case, Utah Governor Jon Huntsman and the Northwest Compact have opposed the imported waste from Italy being disposed in Utah. However, EnergySolutions has asked a federal court in Utah for a judgment on its claim that the Northwest Compact does not have jurisdiction over the Clive, Utah disposal facility.

In light of the pending court challenge, the senators said that this legislation is needed to clarify and give certainty to our nation's policy on the importation of low-level radioactive waste.

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