

## Senator Kubly tours Yucca Mountain site

*A trip to Nevada during the Minnesotan winter seems a good use of public money!*

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State Senator Gary Kubly recently returned from a fact-finding trip to the Yucca Mountain area in Nevada. Yucca Mountain is the proposed site for the federal government's nuclear waste depository. It is literally a tunnel being burrowed into a very large and remote mountain approximately two hours north of Las Vegas on U.S. government property.

Kubly traveled with other members of the Minnesota joint house and senate Legislative Electric Energy Task Force. The group's interest stems from the fact that Minnesota has two nuclear power generating stations currently on line. The stations, located at Monticello and at Prairie Island, near Red Wing, are currently producing and storing spent nuclear fuel rods which are highly radioactive. Both plants are owned by Excel Energy.

The task force and some staff traveled to the site, which is 12 miles from the nearest settlement, where they observed preliminary construction which is taking place at the highly-secured area.

The group also met with several Nevada officials and discussed the plan for Yucca Mountain. That plan has not been well-received in Nevada, Kubly said. He mentioned that only two members of the Nevada legislature voted to approve the plan in the first place and they were both defeated in the next election. The Nevada Attorney General has gone on record as saying that the site will not be opened as long as he is in office, Kubly stated.

It will be three years, according to Kubly, before Yucca Mountain is officially licensed and another four years after that before it will partially open. One hundred and three different sites around the country will provide the 77,000 tons of high-level radioactive nuclear waste to be stored there. It will take between 24 and 38 years to fill the site. Yucca Mountain will then have to be sealed and continuously guarded for over 1,000 years. Over \$8 billion has been spent on the plan at Yucca Mountain so far and the finished product is projected to cost \$60 billion. Minnesota's share of that is \$538 million.

Aside from concerns about security and safety at the site, the other major worry is the transportation of the nuclear waste. It is highly radioactive and will travel mostly by rail via various routes through several large cities, many smaller communities and over dozens of rivers, many of which provide drinking water supplies for the surrounding areas. One of the rail routes proposed for the movement of the waste is through Willmar, Granite Falls, Marshall and on to Sioux City, Iowa. From there, it will go into Nebraska and across Wyoming into Utah and then south to Nevada to a yet-to-be constructed, several-mile-long rail spur to Yucca Mountain. Transporting the waste by rail, while offering the safest means for moving the dangerous cargo, is still a source of concern for many in the various communities and states in which the trains will travel.

Excel's nuclear power plant in Monticello recently filed for a certificate of need for on-site dry cask storage of spent radioactive nuclear fuel rods. That is the same storage method which is being used already at Prairie Island. The legislature will likely be asked

to approve the Monticello storage during the legislative session in 2007. Kubly said he thinks that lawmakers may be inclined to examine the idea of re-establishing a Renewable Development Fund which could be used to again jumpstart renewable fuel energy production efforts similar to the wind and biomass mandates that the legislature demanded in return for the license to store fuel at Prairie Island several years ago. That led to the development of hundreds of high-capacity wind generators along the Buffalo Ridge in far southwestern Minnesota, as well as efforts to build a biomass electrical energy facility in Minnesota. The former proposed MnVAP alfalfa gasification facility that had been planned in Granite Falls was a response to that biomass mandate. The turkey litter-to-electricity power plant under construction in Benson is the result of that mandate.

"In some ways, it is difficult to be opposed to Yucca Mountain, because it will take our waste," Kubly said. Nevertheless, it is probably not the answer and will need to be studied further, he said, adding that the radioactive fuel and waste is a very large problem with nuclear energy and there are no easy answers.

Kubly went on to say that he favors the establishment of a Renewable Energy Standard that would provide a reliable and sustainable source for up to 25 percent of Minnesota's energy needs. This could relieve Minnesota of more of its dependence on nuclear and fossil fuels.

The task force will continue to work toward energy recommendations to be acted on by the legislature.