

# Good Leadership, Bad Politics, and All That

As I write this, both major conventions have concluded. No big surprise, the Democrats have nominated Vice President Al Gore as their presidential candidate, and the Republicans have nominated Texas Gov. George W. Bush.

In case the readers of *Radwaste Solutions* are interested in what these two candidates have said about the issue of nuclear waste in the recent months, I thought I could provide a service by gathering those comments on this page.

Let's start with Al Gore, since he's more of a known quantity, nationally. Indeed, many people have long felt that the Clinton administration's positions on environmental and energy issues reflected the views of the vice president more than that of any other administration official. So we should not be surprised to learn that Gore sides with the Clinton administration's veto of the recent nuclear waste bill, which would have provided for early shipment of spent nuclear fuel to Yucca Mountain. "Until the scientific analysis of the Yucca Mountain site is completed, it is premature to make a determination about its use as a disposal site," Gore responded in a survey early in the year. "For that reason, I have strongly supported the administration's vigorous and successful fight against legislation that would move waste to the Yucca Mountain site before the scientific evaluation is complete." He added that the nuclear waste debate should be "based on science, not politics."

Under the Clinton administration, the Interior Department also stymied development of a low-level radioactive waste disposal site in Ward Valley, Calif., by refusing to transfer federal land to the state. How much of this action can be attributed to Al Gore remains a question. The Hollywood money crowd had been opposed to the Ward Valley facility, and the president's courting of this group has been well known for years.

As for Governor Bush, first we should note that the Republicans in-

cluded a statement of support for nuclear power as a clean energy source in their platform: "The current administration has turned its back on the two sources that produce virtually all the nation's emission-free power: nuclear and hydro, the sources for nearly 30 percent of the country's electricity. Because of cumbersome federal relicensing of hydro and nuclear operations, we face the prospect of increasing emissions and dirtier air."

That being said, the Republican candidate has shown no particular hankering to get too heavily involved in the nuclear waste debate. Bush's one quotable comment on the issue came in a May letter to Kenny Guinn, governor of Nevada, in which he stated: "I believe sound science and not politics must prevail in the designation of any high-level nuclear waste repository. As president, I would not sign legislation that would send nuclear waste to any proposed site unless it's been deemed scientifically safe." Gosh, that sounds familiar.

So, where does that leave the reader of *Radwaste Solutions*? I think what it means is that you can't really base your vote on what a future president *might* do on a particular very politicized issue. We know Al Gore has strong pro-environmental feelings. We know George W. Bush is a former Texas oil man, with presumably some understanding of the energy sector. But beyond that, on an issue this highly charged, unfortunately so many factors influence the "scientific" decisions that no matter how he might try, neither candidate will be able to achieve that goal of allowing science, not politics, to determine his course of action. And that, of course, is the real tragedy for nuclear waste management.

So, vote your conscience, vote your values, vote early and vote often (no, wait, I didn't mean that), just don't expect your vote to solve the current radioactive waste disposal problems.—Nancy J. Zacha, Editor ■



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May the  
Best  
Man Win