

MRS is bad idea in any location

ON Nov. 1, Tennesseans will learn if, once again, we face becoming the designated dumping grounds for much of our nation's most dangerous nuclear waste.

A special commission created by Congress will recommend whether the United States should build an expensive temporary dump for radioactive waste produced and currently stored at nuclear power plants.

The U.S. Department of Energy wants to put this nuclear dump, called a Monitored Retrievable Storage or MRS facility by the Clinch River near Oak Ridge.

Those of us who believe the nuclear dump would be a dangerous waste of money won a battle when DOE's initial proposal for an MRS in Tennessee was rejected by Congress.

But the nuclear door is still open. The recommendation of the MRS commission will influence Congress's next decision on an MRS. I told the commission my reasons for opposing the MRS, as did other Tennesseans. The state of Tennessee submitted detailed testimony explaining the sensible, less costly alternative to the MRS — continued storage of waste at reactor sites until a permanent repository is ready.

But the DOE still wants an MRS. It continues to refuse to consider the lower-cost no MRS plan. If an MRS is approved, DOE will again want to put it in Tennessee. Given DOE's track record in managing nuclear waste, that is a truly frightening thought.

I am opposed not only to an MRS in Tennessee, but to building such a facility anywhere. Our nation needs permanent, not temporary, solutions to the inherently long-term problem of nuclear waste.

The Nuclear Waste Policy Act of 1987 told DOE to build a permanent storage facility by 1998, but DOE is years behind schedule. As I have said many times, I strongly suspect DOE officials view the MRS as a de facto permanent storage place that will allow their agency to meet its



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And at the Rocky Flats nuclear weapons plant near Denver, Colo., the FBI and the EPA are investigating DOE and Rockwell International. The FBI believes DOE and Rockwell officials lied and concealed information, and that hazardous wastes were illegally stored and disposed of at the plant.

Announcing he will hold public hearings around the country to develop a comprehensive new energy strategy, Admiral James Watkins, Secretary of Energy, said it will be important to listen to everybody because right now his department lacks credibility. I could not agree more. But simply listening will not derail the pre-MRS runaway freight train at the DOE.

Rather than presenting objective studies, the DOE simply mobilized its enormous bureaucracy to blanket the MRS commission with volumes of data in support of building an MRS.

Those of us who believe the dump doesn't make sense can't match this informational blizzard. But we do have a logical, cost-effective alternative.

I hope the commissioners have looked beyond DOE's data mound and sought their own answers. They have reason to be skeptical. In the past, DOE's massive presentations have ignored key facts.

A 1987 General Accounting Office study found DOE had pushed the concept without adequately considering alternative technologies. DOE's 1989 testimony to the MRS commission showed the department again failed to consider important alternatives such as contin-