

Part of Watkins' efforts to prevent the Shoreham dismantlement involved informing and educating interest groups, Congress, and other organizations. More actively, Watkins asked the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to prepare a comprehensive environmental impact statement on New York's dismantlement plan. He hoped the Commission would examine significant environmental impacts associated with alternative energy sources and energy reliability problems on Long Island. In addition, the Department asked the Department of Justice to intervene in the New York State courts to prevent the transfer of the plant to the state. Watkins, nonetheless, was not sanguine about the possibility of Shoreham ever opening and operating. What he was trying to do, he admitted, was to keep the plant from being dismantled so that it would be possible to revisit the issue at a future date. Even this, however, was an uphill battle. By spring 1992, prospects for saving Shoreham looked dim. The Department and other Shoreham supporters had prolonged the controversy, but the Nuclear Regulatory Commission decided to allow closure without requiring a full environmental impact statement. Other recourses, as well, were running out, and the state was laying plans for immediate dismantlement.<sup>173</sup>

More promising for the future of nuclear power were the Department's reactor development activities. "A nuclear renaissance," as Acting Assistant Secretary for Nuclear Energy Jerry D. Griffith put it, "is inevitable," and the Department thus continued its efforts to develop passively safe advanced reactor designs that would automatically shut down in an emergency. The Department's civilian reactor program comprised two "parallel and complementary" elements: 1) development of a standardized advanced light water design, and 2) research and development for the modular high-temperature gas reactor and the advanced liquid metal reactor. The Department projected that the advanced light water design would be available by 1995, with the objective of having the first new plant operational by 2000. The Department hoped to demonstrate the commercial potential of the modular high-temperature gas reactor by 2010.<sup>174</sup>

## NUCLEAR WASTE: YUCCA MOUNTAIN

A resurgent nuclear power industry depended upon successful management of the nuclear waste program. At Admiral Watkins' confirmation hearing, Senator Johnston charged that the Department's program lacked aggressive leadership and was in "shambles." Some of the Department's difficulties were attributable to the State of Nevada's continued opposition to the proposed Yucca Mountain high-level waste repository. Ongoing delays caused the Department to announce in 1988 that it would be unable to accept spent reactor fuel by the 1998 date established under the Nuclear Waste Policy Act. This prompted a nuclear utility steering group to consider but narrowly reject a recommendation that the industry sue the Department for alleged violations of the act.<sup>175</sup>

In his Three Mile Island tenth anniversary statement, Watkins noted that the success of the waste management program was of the "utmost importance." A month later, he told reporters that the Department would probably have to "restructure the program" and announce "some kind of new approach." One aspect of this new approach involved offering an olive branch to Nevada. "I think we were moving too aggressively and did not give them a chance," Watkins observed, "and they really felt they were being put upon. And, I think to a certain extent they were right." In late May, Watkins met with Nevada Governor Robert Miller and the State's congressional delegation. He assured the Nevadans that Yucca Mountain was "not a done deal" and the final decision on the repository would be made on scientific rather than political considerations.<sup>176</sup>

Nevada officials, nevertheless, were not eager to cooperate with the Department. In July, Miller signed into law a bill declaring it "unlawful for any person or governmental entity to store high-level radioactive waste in Nevada." Two months later, Miller formally "vetoed" the repository, citing provisions in the Nuclear Waste Policy Act providing veto powers to the state chosen as the repository host. Meanwhile, Nevada Senator Richard Bryan, angry over legislation restricting federal funds for the