

U.S. Rep. Jim Matheson and a bipartisan group of members of Congress are reviving their bill to stop imports of foreign nuclear waste to the United States.

Reps. Bart Gordon, D-Tenn., and Lee Terry, R-Neb., have called a news conference for next week with the Utah Democrat to reintroduce the measure, now dubbed the Radioactive Import Deterrence Act of 2009, or the "RID Act."

The bill would slam the door shut on most foreign-generated radioactive waste seeking disposal in U.S. landfills, including the low-level radioactive waste site owned and operated by Salt Lake City-based EnergySolutions Inc. in Tooele County.

"Utah is not the place for the world's radioactive junk," said Matheson.

"We have increasing domestic demand for low-level radioactive waste disposal and shrinking space. I see no good reason, as public policy, to allow other countries to dump their waste here."

Members of Congress first proposed the bill last year after EnergySolutions applied for a license from the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission to use the Utah site to dispose of waste from cleaning up Italy's defunct nuclear reactor program. Senators, led by Lamar Alexander of Tennessee, also had a bill to ban waste importation, but neither version passed in the last session of Congress.

With the new Congress seated, the lawmakers hope to press forward with the legislation.

EnergySolutions' Jill Sigal said the company "fully expected" the return of

the bill. She hopes once again authority over the industry remains with the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

"We do not believe the [NRC] should be stripped of authority," she said, adding that the bill would do exactly that. "We have full faith and confidence in their expertise."

In Utah, news of the bill was welcomed by the leader of the state Radiation Control Board.

Board chairman Peter Jenkins said the bill "will generate useful discussion" of the issue.

Last winter, the board urged federal regulators and policymakers to deal with foreign waste imports on a national level because U.S. disposal capacity for low-level radioactive waste is limited. In addition, the board indicated that disposal should be the responsibility of the nation generating the waste.

EnergySolutions has accepted waste from the United Kingdom, Canada, Mexico, Germany, France and Taiwan. Its Sept. 14, 2007, application to accept up to 20,000 tons of cleanup waste from Italy to process metals from that waste at a Tennessee plant and to bury about 1,600 tons in Utah prompted a regional waste agency to say that such imports are not permitted.

Then, in May, EnergySolutions took the question to a federal judge, who is expected to hear oral arguments next month on whether the Northwest Interstate Compact on Low-level Radioactive Waste has authority over the Utah site.

Several thousand people objected to the EnergySolutions Italian waste import request during a public comment period.

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