

DEBATE: SHOULD THE GOSHUTES BUILD A TEMPORARY NUCLEAR WASTE STORAGE SITE ON THE SKULL VALLEY RESERVATION?

YES: FORREST CUCH

DE: Can you give an example of [a political issue] that doesn't get closely examined?

FC: Well the nuclear issue, nuclear energy. We've gone the spectrum of slapping down the Skull Valley Goshutes but now we're entertaining these building studies to construct seven—possibly seven nuclear plants here in Utah. So that to me is, it's not only hypocrisy, it's outrageous. It's—to me it reflects people who lack information. They're too quick to judge and they don't examine issues. It also suggests that people jump to conclusions here. Just because you store nuclear spent [fuel] rods, does not mean you have to jump into the nuclear industry or vice-versa. I was essentially opposed to the concept of storing nuclear spent rods until I heard the testimony of numerous scientists from the University of Utah in particular. And most of their presentations indicated that it could actually be stored safely, to which I come to see that that was a wonderful business opportunity for Skull Valley Goshutes. It didn't mean an endorsement of the nuclear industry whatsoever, in my view, but some people took it that way. So I had to stay—Working for the governor, I had to stay neutral on the issue. But in the end I simply did not think that it was damaging to the earth especially due to the fact that nuclear energy is a reality of most communities east of the Mississippi [River]. And this was information that most people weren't exposed to prior to this time. I heard complaints about the fact that Skull Valley Reservation was so close to Salt Lake City [Utah]. And they kept saying "Oh it's only 35-40 miles" and that was a lie. I went and checked it myself. It's over 65 miles to Skull Valley from Salt Lake City [Utah] and that's from, well, like the airport. You get out to the airport and from there on it's about 60 miles. So it's—people were really unfair and the information that was exchanged about that. I happened to live in Massachusetts for

six or seven years and I happened to know that there's a reactor that is within a short distance from the metropolis of Boston, and that's the Seabrook reactor. And that's not very far. I mean that's within twenty miles, 15-20 miles I believe, I'm not sure. But it's certainly much much closer than Skull Valley. And that was spent rods; that's not a reactor. You know what I'm saying. I mean to me there was an overreaction on the part of—Utah is—what really bothers me is it really has a "the sky is falling," you know, reaction to things. It's like a reaction to many—so many things. And that's because they lack so much information about things and have leaders who are overzealous in their reactions. . . . So I've seen this state turn around from one of slapping down the [Skull Valley] Goshutes for even considering the idea. "How dare you in our own backyard?" And then turn around and entertain the possibilities for even more exposure to dangerous levels of atomic energy and waste. So especially considering the fact that we have a socially acceptable organization, Energy Solutions, that keeps wanting to raise the level of waste from hazardous to nearly nuclear. And it's such a hypocrisy to me. I think that's what stands out the most about the Skull Valley situation there. And so my education and my experience was directly contrary to what Governor Levitt and what everyone else was saying. I just kept shaking my head saying, "Don't they understand there's another world out there? That France has been operating on nuclear energy for decades and they have been able to store it safely. Don't they know that most of the communities east of the Mississippi rely and most products are manufactured using nuclear energy?" I mean, wake up. You know, I was always told you need to gather the facts and no one was gathering the facts at that time.

I would think if people are so concerned about their health and radioactivity etcetera, they ought to be concerned about particles and the pollution in the air in Salt Lake Valley. That's certainly a far more serious situation here. And they ought to be concerned about the emissions that are coming from the coal firing plants—power plants in our state. And, of course, there's so much politics and money involved in that. They're not about to even consider that. And the idea that you can have clean coal-burning plants is a fiasco also. I heard the good side of that and then I heard the bad side of that and I've come to realize that that's a joke. We need to be pursuing alternative sources of energy with rigor, not in a mediocre fashion or as something we can do in our spare time. This needs to be taken seriously.

DE: So you mentioned several times that there were fairness issues, . . . that it was unfair. Who was it unfair to?

FC: It was unfair to the [Skull Valley] Goshutes. It was unfair to Leon [Bear], the chairman of the Skull Valley Tribe. He was villianized as the bad guy, the person who wants to expose Utah citizens to waste—nuclear waste. And there have been far more bad guys that have endangered the health of Utah citizens far more than Leon Bear. You have the atomic energy experimentations. You have nuclear bombs in Nevada, the [Nevada] Test Site. Then a lot of the fallout was entering Utah and a lot of people were exposed to the fallout and consequently died of cancer—various forms of cancer. And they certainly were far more dangerous than Leon Bear. The originators and the operators with Envirocare and now, Energy Solutions are far more dangerous to Utah citizens than Leon Bear. The owners and operators of Magcorp that were dumping tens of thousands of gallons of waste from chlorine gas into the air—and they've been doing that for some thirty years—are far more dangerous than Leon Bear. But these people are never spoken about. You know, you don't hear anything about them. They get away with it. And they make millions of dollars in the process. And that's not fair. It's not fair that some people in this state get paid hundreds

of thousands of dollars not to grow crops while my brother and I barely can't—we lose money raising hay to feed our horses. Some of these are very wealthy people that are getting paid by U.S. Department of Agriculture. So there's lots of unfairness you know.

DE: So can you talk about the role of sovereignty and in relationship I think to this unfairness that you're talking about or just in general to the Skull Valley situation.

FC: Well sovereignty is like freedom to the American citizens who talk about fighting and dying for freedom. American Indians have fought and died for sovereignty. Sovereignty existed here before the Europeans—Euro-Americans ever entered this continent. Indian nations were governing themselves and they had the full authority to do so. And the colonial governments dealt with Indian nations accordingly because at the time they had to. The Indian nations were strong enough militarily to defend themselves and to wage costly wars against the colonials. And so the sovereignty that Indian people enjoy today was brought about as a consequence of war. In the State of Utah alone there were over 150 battles fought between all the tribes and the Mormon settlers. This was a bloody confrontation. People would have you believe otherwise but it's not true. There were lots of bloody confrontations here. One of the largest military encounters in the United States was the Bear River Massacre. And although it was in southern Idaho—just over the border—it involved Utah American Indians, the northwest band Shoshone.

So sovereignty nowadays comes about as a result of war, which is based at the end of those wars, and then people surrendered certain rights in return for agreements in exchange for land. Certain services were guaranteed by the U.S. government in exchange for peace and for those lands. And those services range from education to housing to health. And those agreements are still in force today because those treaties were considered international instruments of law and they are binding to this day. They have an international

connotation because they are dealing between different nations. And Indian nations are nations within the U.S. nation. So that's what kind of makes them kind of distinct in that respect, but they are nations nevertheless. And so tribes are very protective of that sovereignty. And it's important for people to understand that because most people only see sovereignty as applying to city, county, and state governments. And they don't see how it applies to an Indian tribe unless they get a history lesson about the military confrontations that took place not only in this state but throughout this country. And only then do they seem to understand how sovereignty applies to Indian tribes. We're not like other groups. We have a political relationship with the U.S. government not a racial one. It's a political one based on solemn agreements. Okay. Our people are referenced in the commerce clause of the U.S. Constitution as being—having sovereign qualities. So we are different. We're not like other ethnic groups. And the Indian people are very protective of that because we don't want to be swallowed up in the mire and in the context of the great American melting pot. Indian people want to retain their identity and their culture. They don't want to be mixed in with other minorities either. Because they would lose their identities just as sure under the minority context as they would under the dominant culture context. Indian people are very protective of their identity. Even though we are very oppressed and would seem to suffer low self-esteem—which we do—our heritage we hold high.

DE: So you mentioned that if people don't get this history, that they may not know about this sovereign relationships. I know that you were a teacher, and of course have gone through the school system. Do you think that's taught enough?

FC: No. That's why there's so much ignorance. That's why people going all the way to the U.S.—not to the U.S.—but our own state legislature lack that history—that information. If they had that information then they—there would be—they would have more understanding of our plight, our situation.

DE: And then returning to the Skull Valley controversy, do you think that that lack of information or the sovereignty issue came up in that controversy or did it not?

FC: What I meant to say also, and this touches on that, is...almost—I think all of the Utah tribes, I'm pretty certain, all the Utah tribes opposed the idea of storing nuclear spent rods on Skull Valley Reservation. They opposed the project, but they stood solidly behind the Skull Valley Tribe's right to make that decision. So, although they didn't like the idea, they stood behind the sovereign rights of the Skull Valley Tribe to do so. And that's very important to be pointed out. Is that the tribes, once again, they value sovereignty. And they stood by Skull Valley all the way through this. They stood by the right to Skull Valley to exercise their authority.