

**COMMITTEE TO BRIDGE THE GAP**

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immediate  
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**Statement by Daniel Hirsch  
President  
Committee. to Bridge the Gap**

**Regarding Governor Wilson's Announcement That He Is Issuing the Ward Valley  
License Today, Will Hold a Hearing Later**

Wilson's actions give new meaning to the phrase, "Shoot first and ask questions later." Only these bullets are radioactive, and will keep on killing for generations.

Governor Wilson's announcement is astonishing. In response to Secretary Babbitt's determination that there are unresolved safety issues requiring a hearing, Governor Wilson agrees to hold some sort of a hearing in the future, but issues the license now anyway.

Obviously Wilson is. not about to let the, facts interfere with his decision to pander to the nuclear lobby. The public interest be damned.

Today is Rosh Hashana, the beginning of the Jewish New Year. Governor Wilson has certainly started the new year off with a big bang--a nuclear explosion of sorts. But he should be reminded that after Rosh Hashana comes Yom' Kippur, the Day of Atonement. Governor Wilson's sins Of today will be repented for long into the future. Unfortunately, it will be future generations of Californians who will have to repent for the environmental sins the Governor is trying to bestow on us. Tens of thousands of people may die from leaking radioactive wastes from this ill-conceived project. We vow to continue to fight to prevent that from happening.

The Governor's insistence that the hearing' involve no discovery--public access to records--'and be restricted to approximately 5% of the outstanding issues, with a judge precluded from 'issuing proposed findings of fact at its conclusion, makes clear Wilson is trying to make the hearing a sham. The company Wilson chose to license today, now calling itself US Ecology, operated failed nuclear dumps in Illinois and Kentucky. Wilson invites the same radioactive contamination here, unless he is stopped.

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## Wilson's Proposal for a Hearing

1. No “discovery”--no public access to records about the Ward Valley project kept secret by the California Department of Health Services or US Ecology
2. Issues restricted to about 5% of the outstanding issues. Among the issues precluded:
  - any matter related to US Ecology, its track record or qualifications (it operated three failed nuclear dumps elsewhere)
  - anything related to the primitive proposed design (unlined trenches) or alternatives to it
  - “waste stream” issues--uncertainties about how much radioactivity, of what type, is to be dumped at Ward Valley
  - potential liability for state taxpayers (State Controller says liability could be immense; court just yesterday once again found state liable for contamination at Stringfellow Acid Pits because it did inadequate safety review prior to licensing it)
3. Judge precluded from issuing any findings; can only issue a brief report indicating whether new information was presented; “is not to formally find any facts to be true or issues to be proven”; essentially the judge is prohibited from judging.
4. Opening statements prohibited.
5. All environmental groups in the state must be consolidated into a single party, represented by a single person.
6. Issue the license now--hold the hearing to get the facts afterwards. (“Shoot now, ask questions later.”)

## Key Issues Regarding Ward Valley

1. The company which got licensed today has an atrocious track record. It was ranked least qualified of all applicants by the state, due in part to its history of having operated failed nuclear dumpsites in other states. In Kentucky, their dump has been closed due to radioactive leakage and is now a SuperFund site; the Kentucky taxpayer got stuck with the bill. In Illinois, they abandoned their contaminated dumpsite, requiring state and federal authorities to take legal action to force them back on the site to stabilize the leaking wastes.
2. The design proposed is the most primitive imaginable--unlined trenches. Dig a hole, dump wastes in it, cover it up.
3. Wilson and US Ecology claim it will take ten thousand years for radioactivity to reach groundwater 600 feet below. US EPA and State Water Quality Control Board point out that actual measurements of radioactive migration at the site from fallout shows radioactivity migrates in just decades, calling into serious question the optimistic claims of the proponents' models.
4. The dumpsite sits atop a pristine aquifer of 5-8 million acre feet of water--a few percent of all usable groundwater in the state. Yet the dump is designed to leak.
5. The Ward Valley aquifer appears connected to the Colorado River, just 20 miles away and a major water source for most of the southwest. Los Angeles gets much of its water from the Colorado River through the open-air Colorado River Aqueduct which runs through the southern part of Ward Valley.
6. There are major uncertainties about the wastes to go to Ward Valley. Proponents claim it is just "low level" material, contaminated booties and gloves from medicine and universities. But US Department of Energy figures demonstrate that more than 90% comes from nuclear reactors--very toxic, long-lived material--and only a fraction of a percent from medicine and academic institutions. 100 pounds of plutonium--with a half life of 24,000 years--are to be dumped in Ward Valley's unlined trenches by US Ecology's own estimates. That is the amount of plutonium in about 15 nuclear bombs.
7. Liability--Controller Gray Davis conducted a study estimating leakage at Ward Valley could cost state taxpayers up to half a billion dollars in liability. A bill by Assemblyman Byron Sher to provide some protection against liability for the taxpayer passed the legislature last year but was vetoed by the Governor, at the urging of the nuclear industry.
8. Desert Tortoise--Interior Dept. has just proposed Ward Valley as "critical habitat" for the Desert Tortoise, a threatened species. The nuclear dump would destroy that critical habitat.