Economist contests nuclear waste site

Volume of waste declining, he says

LOS ANGELES (AP) - A California desert and others proposed around the nation would be costly, unnecessary and could sink the industry, an economist said Wednesday.

The nation's three current dumps for low-level radioactive waste have excess capacity well into the next century because the volume of waste is sharply down due to recycling and new compaction technologies, said F. Gregory Hayden, a University of Nebraska professor.

A new dump such as Ward Valley project in southeastern California would be the final straw for struggling disposal sites, Hayden said.

"If it's opened, it will break the system that the rest of the nation depends on," Hayden said. "They're already in trouble because of the trickle of waste."

Opponents in the 17-year-old battle over a California dump brought Hayden to City Hall for a news conference. Hayden has opposed a Nebraska site in his role as state representative on one of the interstate compacts established to build new dumps.

Up to now, environmentalists, politicians and Indian tribe members who live close to the proposed 1,000acre Ward Valley site near Needles have based their opposition on fears that the plan to bury radioactive waste in trenches at the dump would poison the water table, imperil wildlife and possibly pollute the nearby Colorado River.

But the capacity argument is conclusive, argued Daniel Hirsch, president of the Committee to Bridge the Gap, an environmental group that has fought the dump.

The very reason for this whole fight has disappeared," Hirsch said. "I feel that ... the war is over."

However, Gov. Pete Wilson intends to continue pressing for the federal government to cede land for the dump site, a spokeswoman said.

'This study changes nothing," Lisa Kalustian said. "The other sites that are named are unreliable, we don't have guaranteed access to them. The low-level radioactive waste is still being produced. ... We have a need to dispose of it responsibly in a safe, reliable, secure location, and that site is Ward Valley.'

Wilson and U.S. Senate Republicans, with financial backing from the nuclear power industry, are fighting in federal court and in Congress to get the Ward Valley

Early next year, the Clinton

Canada geese in the state who are

confused by the recent fair weather

warm spell has enabled the geese to

stay up north or actually linger over

parts of Nebraska, returning north

areas in the winter months.

The geese normally migrate

as they please.

Low-level wastes, which planned nuclear dump in the California currently ships out of state, include contaminated clothing from power plants and needles, gloves and similar items from hospitals, industry and research facilities. They are considered less hazardous than high-level wastes like spent nuclear fuel rods or military bombmaking equipment.

A 1980 federal act required states to be responsible for handling the waste they generate and encouraged multistate compacts to build new dumps. At the time, political opposition by some states to handling outside wastes prompted threats to close the current dumps, leaving nowhere to put rising levels of waste.

But as debate over new dumps raged, "market forces have solved this problem," Hayden said.

His report, presented last month at the National Conference of State Legislatures in Washington, D.C., found that the annual volume of lowlevel waste shipped to disposal sites dropped between 1980 and 1996 to 422,000 cubic feet from 3.8 million cubic feet.

In California, the volume of waste dropped 94 percent to about 12,000 cubic feet, Hayden said.

The downward trend prompted officials to withdraw or reassess support for new dumps in Nebraska, North Carolina, Ohio and Texas, all scheduled to be built after Ward Valley.

The decline means that the three current dump sites in Richland, Wash. Barnwell, S.C., and Clive, Utah, have anywhere from 29 to 260 years of capacity at current disposal rates, which probably will drop even further, Hayden said.

American Ecology Corp., a Boise, Idaho, company that holds the state license to operate Ward Valley, agreed there is overcapacity, but said the real issue is the 1980 act.

'It's not shortage of capacity that is prompting the efforts, it's an existing federal law ... the debate is academic," said Joe Nagel, chief operating officer. "Unless and until the Clinton administration decides to repeal the existing law, this is much ado about nothing.

Nagel said American Ecology has invested \$50 million in the past 12 years on the project and "we'll continue to pursue the site."

Hayden said Ward Valley, which would serve California, Arizona and North and South Dakota, is economically unsound because of the declin-

Omaha may appeal shooting case

■ A Judge's order says victim's family can obtain any evidence of their son's death from the investigation.

OMAHA (AP) — The city was expected to file two appeals in an effort to fight a judge's order to hand over reports about the shooting of an Omaha man by a police officer.

"I believe this means that it stays the enforcement of the order until the appeal is determined," said Thomas Mumgaard, assistant city attorney. "That's at least what we're asking for."

Mumgaard said the appeals holding information. would be filed Wednesday afternoon in Douglas County District family has a legal right to the Court and the Nebraska Court of

Atkins ruled last week that Marvin Ammons' family was entitled to police reports, crime scene photographs and other evidence gathered in an investigation into her

Ammons, 33, was shot to death on Oct. 26 by officer-in-training Todd Sears. Police said Ammons approached police with a gun and refused to stop or drop his weapon. Critics have accused police of with-

The judge ruled that Ammons'

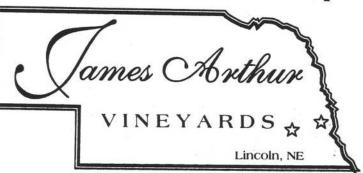
Mumgaard has argued that turn-Douglas County Judge Edna ing the police records over to the family could violate a grand jury investigation of the shooting.

A Douglas County grand jury will meet in private at the end of December to review the shooting and determine whether Sears and his partner, Officer Troy Kister, acted properly or should be prose-

Both the FBI and the U.S. Attorney's office also are investigating the shooting.

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fields and until the reservoir The unusual warmth up north has greatly affected the number of geese arriving in Nebraska. Last in the Dakotas and Canada. The year's migration - which hit record numbers - was 250 percent higher than the previous year.

'We just don't have the numbers we had last year," Hoffman said.

There are still some birds that from northern climates to southern come south, regardless of the weather, Hoffman said. Goose hunters Rocky Hoffman, public infor- have had some success, although a mation officer for the Nebraska little less than typical, he said.

