Meanwhile, workers exposed to dangerous materials -- such as the plutonium secretly laced into uranium during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s -- had waited years just for some partial compensation. And forgive workers if they remain skeptical about any payment for past sufferings until the program actually goes into effect later this year.

These employees could be forgiven that October day for fearing that promises would not be kept.

And now, what are they -- many of them Cold War veterans who helped construct the nation's atomic defenses by producing weapons-grade uranium at peril to their own health -- to think? Indeed, what is an entire region -- economically depressed and oft-ignored by the powers that be in Columbus and Washington -- to think?

One of the first acts of the Bush administration's Energy Department was to suspend the Piketon standby program and hold up the initial $161 million released for the project on the Clinton administration's last day.

That followed an opinion issued by the General Accounting Office, an investigative agency that acts at the behest of Congress, that the initiative was being improperly funded. Richardson proposed using money from a pot of public funds left over from the USEC privatization.

But the GAO, whose opinion was requested by a Republican lawmaker suspicious that the Clinton administration was springing an October surprise designed to help Democrat Al Gore's election chances in Ohio, said the money was supposed to be used for expenses related to privatization and asserted the standby initiative didn't qualify.

The accounting office opinion doesn't carry the force of law, and Clinton administration legal counsel had insisted the allocation was proper. Of course, waiting to send off the initial payment until the day before Bush took office didn't help matters.

A spokesman for the Energy Department, now run by Secretary of Energy Spencer Abraham, a former GOP senator from Michigan, said all the right things last week. The Bush administration remains committed to helping Piketon, carrying out the standby initiative and working out any problems with how the initiative is funded, according to spokesman Joe Davis.

The money was held up so a new administration and energy secretary could review the situation, he said.

Since Bush used the campaign to promise help for Piketon, there's little else his administration can say.

Still, I remember what one worker told me in the midst of the celebrating at the Piketon plant after Richardson's announcement, "I'll believe it when I see the money."

Chances are, the money soon will be on the way. But it's not hard to understand why Piketon workers and other southern Ohioans might have that attitude.

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-------- utah

'DOWNWINDERS' HONORED:
Utah adopts resolution Day of Remembrance for nuke test victims set

January 28, 2001
By ROBERT GEHRKE
SALT LAKE CITY -- It's been 50 years since the Army first tested nuclear weapons in Southern Nevada, and the fallout is still lingering.

Utah Gov. Mike Leavitt and his state's Legislature adopted a resolution Friday commemorating the anniversary of the first open-air atomic bomb test and the "downwinders" who paid the price.

Rep. Neal Hendrickson, D-West Valley City, said his parents and his sister died from cancer related to the fallout that drifted east from Nevada and blanketed parts of southern Utah.

"I happened to stand on the Black Ridge of St. George and watch those clouds come up and the dust blow over and fall on the citizens," said Rep. Jack Seitz, R-Vernal.

Saturday marked the 50th anniversary of the first test. They went on for 37 years, with the government insisting all along they posed no threat.

"This is government at its absolute worst and if we don't remember it with a resolution like this we are going to repeat it," said Rep. Stephen Urquhart, R-St. George.

The resolution also notes that miners in Utah, Arizona, Colorado and New Mexico and the Navajo Nation who gathered uranium for the nuclear weapons program later contracted diseases caused by the radiation.

"I think we'll never know how much suffering went unrecognized," said Sen. Chris Buttars, R-West Jordan. His father had a sheep ranch near Payson, and said that after tests the fields were covered with white ash.

The resolution sets Jan. 27 as a Day of Remembrance "to recognize the legacy of the Cold War and express hope for peace, justice, healing, reconciliation, and the fervent desire and commitment to assure that such a legacy will never be repeated."

A group of downwinders gathered at the Capitol on Saturday to commemorate the anniversary.

Last July, President Clinton signed a bill paying up to $100,000 to people sickened by Cold War-era uranium mining and nuclear tests, expanding on a 1990 law.

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Radiation Victims Honored

Sunday, January 28, 2001
Salt Lake Tribune
BY LINDA FANTIN
http://www.sltrib.com/01282001/utah/66597.htm

As far as golden anniversaries go, Saturday was about as solemn as it gets.

At 5:05 a.m. on Jan. 27, 1951, an atomic bomb lighted up the desert sky, the Nevada Test Site became operational and before long, lethal uranium deposits throughout the West were mined to build America's nuclear weapons arsenal.

Fifty years later, Ed Brickey is still losing friends to the fallout, friends like Carol Dewey of Dove Creek, Colo.
Dewey grew up around the uranium mines owned and operated by her late father. As president of the Colorado Plateau Uranium Workers, she lobbied tirelessly so that victims of radiation exposure, like her father, would be compensated by the U.S. government.

She died Thursday, her neck swollen with a rare form of cancer, and unexpectedly became one of the victims she intended to honor at Saturday's anniversary rally in the rotunda of the Utah Capitol.

"That's what we've come to expect when you grow up around a mill," said Brickey as he flipped through old photographs of Uravan, a Utah mining town outside Moab where he was raised. "We never had a choice. That's what's so sad about it."

Duped by the government about the dangers of atomic radiation, Brickey not only followed his father into uranium mining, he also worked at the Nevada Test Site.

On Friday, he joined a small group of uranium miners, Navajos and "downwinders" to commemorate the somber anniversary and to use the occasion to blast Washington, D.C., lawmakers for not doing enough to compensate victims of radiation exposure.

Led by Utah's Sen. Orrin Hatch, Congress passed the 1990 Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA) guaranteeing up to $100,000 to downwinders and miners -- then didn't fund it for two years. Now the program is broke and the government is handing out IOUs.

In July, President Clinton signed an amendment to the 1990 law extending the compensation to millers and transporters of radioactive uranium ore. Again, the money is slow to follow and the government has yet to release the criteria so victims can apply for the funds.

"It didn't take near this long to compensate the Japanese for their suffering during World War II," said Mary Brickey.

Life is especially grim for the Navajos, who not only worked in the mines but lived downwind of the Nevada nuclear blasts. Goats and sheep ate grass contaminated by clouds of radioactive dust tainting the milk and meat that feed the clans. Even the rocks that were used to construct their houses are hot.

Elsie Mae Begay's hogan -- a traditional Navajo dwelling where Begay and her family had lived for years in Monument Valley -- has a floor made from such stones. Earlier this summer, the Environmental Protection Agency found that radiation levels were 80 times acceptable levels.

On Nov. 14, the EPA wrote to Begay promising to remove the hogan and replace it with a wooden structure by December.

"We're still waiting," Begay said Saturday.

Navajos often have a tougher time qualifying for federal aid because medical records, birth certificates and other official documents the government demands do not exist for many tribe members stricken with radiation-related diseases.

Others, like Dave Timothy, are excluded from the narrowly-written legislation.

Timothy lived in northern Utah in 1962 when winds plastered the area with radioactive fallout from above ground tests conducted at the Nevada site. Timothy, whose neck bares the scar from thyroid surgery, said he remembers the milk was so contaminated it had to be dumped down the sink.
But RECA only allows for downwinders in southern Utah to apply for compensation.

He called the legislation "a scam," saying it was designed to limit the government's risk, not to adequately compensate victims.

J. Truman agrees. The director of Downwinders says by restricting the categories of victims, Congress has prevented victims from "getting enough numbers to kick some butt in Washington."

He and others hope that will change.

"A lot of work must be done before justice is done," he said.

-------- MILITARY

-------- burma/myanmar

Myanmar's Military Rule Entrenched

AP
Sun, 28 Jan 2001
By DENIS D. GRAY, Associated Press Writer

YANGON, Myanmar (AP) - Myanmar's ruling military has eased its withering pressure on pro-democracy activists, raising hopes for some that a Western economic boycott is finally having an effect.

But even as a European Union delegation is scheduled to arrive Monday to press for more liberalization, some analysts say the junta is unlikely to meaningfully loosen a nearly 40-year grip on power.

Hope was recently sparked that a decade-old deadlock between the generals and pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi could be broken after word emerged the two sides have been holding secret talks for nearly four months.

This dialogue, the first since 1994, is being called a "landmark" by dissident exiles and hailed by the United Nations. Some Western diplomats in the region say it's evidence the junta is in desperate economic straits.

But several Myanmar intellectuals, who spoke on condition of anonymity to avoid trouble with the junta, don't expect a resolution in the foreseeable future. Some foreign analysts agree.

"The dialogue is very much a show for the European Union, Japanese and the new Bush administration," said Josef Silverstein, an American political scientist who has studied Myanmar for a half century. "It's a play for the international community."

For a start, both Suu Kyi and the top military leaders are true believers in their competing political views, say observers who know the key players personally. Such people rarely are willing to compromise.

The generals regard themselves as Myanmar's saviors, and their hostility to Suu Kyi is almost visceral. Their core position - that they will retain power as long as they see fit - appears nonnegotiable.

"The Lady," as she is widely known, is a passionate democrat whose uncompromising stance sometimes borders on arrogance. This, and the Nobel Prize laureate's great popularity in the West, further infuriates the military.