

**Steve Erickson**  
**Salt Lake City, UT**

**An Interview by**  
**Samantha Senda-Cook**

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**THIS IS AN INTERVIEW WITH STEVE ERICKSON ON DECEMBER 17, 2009. THE INTERVIEWER IS SAMANTHA SENDA-COOK. THIS IS THE NUCLEAR TECHNOLOGY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT, TAPE NO. u-3032.**

**SSC:** So my name is Samantha Senda-Cook and I am at 444 Northmont Way in Salt Lake City, Utah. It is the seventeenth of December around 2:30 in the afternoon. And I am here with...

**SE:** Steve Erickson.

**SSC:** So Steve would you spell your full name for me please?

**SE:** It's E-R-I-C-K-S-O-N.

**SSC:** And Steve is just S...

**SE:** T-E-V-E.

**SSC:** Okay, great. And then is this your current residence?

**SE:** It is.

**SSC:** And how long have you lived here?

**SE:** Since 2002, so seven years.

**SSC:** And then I saw I saw online that you were the Director of the Citizen Education project? Is that your current occupation?

**SE:** Well I'm a consultant, so I work on a variety of different nonprofit-related issues primarily. I work mostly with Crossroads Urban Center during the legislative session as one of their team of people on the hill. So I'm kind of a contract lobbyist if you will, and so working on Medicaid, housing issues, general assistance tax policy, those kinds of issues that affect Utah's lower income households. Also I'm the Coordinator of—Utah Coordinator for the Great Basin Water Network. So we're fighting Las Vegas and their plans to build a pipeline to suck all the water out of the Great Basin and pump it down to

Vegas for culinary purposes. So anyway I do a variety of different jobs over a period of time. I worked on some issues with the Citizens Education Project. We'll be dealing with current plans to privatize the state mental hospital. Also tracking criminal justice issues—Crime and Punishment Bills we call them. So that'll be part of the agenda during the session. We're bringing a new person on the CEP I can't talk about quite yet but that'll be kind of fun. So we'll continue to do these kinds of patch together a living is what I do.

**SSC:** All right. Great.

END OF TAPE

**SSC:** The purpose of oral history interviews is to establish not only things about the context or the topic that we're talking about but also about you as an individual. And so we're going to talk about your background a little bit and then move into your relationship with nuclear waste. All right so what is your birthplace and your birthday?

**SE:** I was born in Illinois, Libertyville, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago to the north. And my birthdate is 2-28-53—so fifty-six nearly fifty-seven years old.

**SSC:** Okay, and do you have any siblings?

**SE:** I have two brothers—they're both younger—and one in California, one in Minnesota.

**SSC:** And can you tell—talk a little bit about your family life growing up?

**SE:** I had a very good childhood, great parents, in a suburban town. I guess I thrived. I was a model student in high school. I was president of my class, captain of the basketball team [laugh] and all of that sort of thing. And then I went to college—and changed my



life. [Laugh] So I'm married with two children. And both now grown up and out of the house. And great kids, one in Minnesota and one in Ohio so...

**SSC:** And you kind of alluded to when—in answer to my next question which is, what were some major events growing up? And so you mentioned college changed your life. Can you talk a little bit about how?

**SE:** Well I would say that I was always in a household where we talked about issues of the day my mother and I especially. And towards the end of my high school years we were in the middle of the Vietnam War. And I was opposed to the war all along and was—had a teacher I think in my junior year of high school—probably was my junior year—named Morello. She was the—her son is the first black in our town; it was a lily-white suburb. Her son is now a rock and roll star, Tom Morello, Rage Against the Machine. So quite a superstar but he was the son of this Mrs. Morello—which I know her first name I can't recall. And her husband was a Kikuyu chieftain from Kenya. And so he was mixed race. Anyway she introduced me to black power literature at the time. And you know it would have been in the middle of this Civil Rights movement that was happening far away from me it seemed. But I was cognizant of it and paying attention, start reading black literature and black power literature of the day. It was a tumultuous time in the late sixties and early seventies of course with the assassinations and with the riots and with the war and the anti-war movement beginning to really grow dramatically. So I was paying attention to all of that stuff. And in the end I wound up going to college at Columbia in Manhattan and got involved in the anti-war movement that was campus-based. And it was quite an eye opener living in New York City after living in the suburbs even though I wasn't a sheltered child or anything. We've been around. But we lived in



the dorms my freshman year of course and in the middle of the big city. And New York in the early seventies was a pretty rough and tumble place. My second year there, I lived in an apartment on a Hundred and Tenth Street in Amsterdam, which Hundred and Tenth Street is sort of the dividing line between Morningside Heights which is the university community and very diverse—a lot of foreign students but fairly upscale for that part of the city. And then across the street was Spanish Harlem from a Hundred and Tenth Street down into the eighties. And then just to the East was Harlem. So right in the middle of a lot of interesting stuff going on and seeing a lot of poverty on the streets, a lot of homeless people a lot of down and out folks. The black community at the time was really poor; crime rate was high. We had in my apartment building we had elevator robberies and people robbed at knifepoint. And we had a house of prostitution on the first floor which was most interesting. So it was a strange time and a lot was going on. And I was involved in the anti-war movement at the time and wound up in demonstrations. In fact in one I was arrested. Spent the night in the toms in New York City which was quite an experience and wound up kind of in a solidarity cell with six or seven other people. And we had later on wound up shutting down a major building on the campus. Crowds of I don't know hundreds of people were there in support. And the seven of us locked arms and here come the storm troopers and it was a wild time. So that was really my first taste of serious political activism. The campus was shut down by anti-war activists for several days in the spring of 1972. We were involved—I was involved with a couple of my friends providing support from the outside into some of the campus buildings with food and other supplies that they needed. So I spent one night in the physics building with a bunch of people who were occupying it. And this was a time in the Ivy League, there

were some physics students and professors. They were all wearing skinny ties and [laugh] and their short hair, real clean cut Ivy League types. And we were all in blue jeans and bell-bottoms and long hair, hippy types. It was an interesting mix. And in comes Alan Ginsberg and he and his tabla player—his name escapes me right now—sat down and played for the physics students and professors. And he chanted poetry into the night. So it was remarkable stuff like that that happened at Columbia. So eventually wound up dropping out of there being in dispute with my father over Vietnam. I was fortunate and got a high number. Went down to—live with my friends in Georgia and worked on a truck dock down there. I was trying to find out what real working people thought about some of the issues of the day because meetings of the Students for Democratic Society—SDS in New York at Columbia. They sort of have this idea—talked as if they knew what the working class wanted. And I was very suspicious of that, being a practical Midwesterner, it just didn't make sense to me. Then I found out very quickly that I was right working on a truck dock—a non-union truck dock in Atlanta for a year. Then wound up moving out here. I arrived in Salt Lake on the day Richard Nixon resigned August 9th 1974. Been here ever since. Been doing political work, issues related work most of that time.

**SSC:** You mentioned you got a high number and I'm guessing you're referring to your draft...

**SE:** My draft number yeah.

**SSC:** Yeah. So...

**SE:** Two hundred ninety-five as I recall. [Laugh]



**SSC:** You remember it. You mentioned Mrs. Morello. I'm wondering if there are other major ethical influences in your life that you would identify.

**SE:** Oh I would say mostly my parents—both career schoolteachers. My father taught school for thirty-eight years and was athletic director and coach and refereed football and basketball at the high school and college level. My mother was a schoolteacher. Taught in a one-room school when she started her career in Grand Tool, Illinois. She lived in Danville. She worked as a schoolteacher and librarian and got her masters in Library Science. Was the librarian for the school district for thirty-four years. So was exposed to a lot of books and ideas. And they were just very good parents. So can't complain, wanted to be a writer but I wasn't screwed up enough. [Laugh]

**SSC:** So what made you come to live in Salt Lake City?

**SE:** Well it was serendipitous. I was living with a woman who later became my first wife and we were—this group I was living with in Georgia were a lot of the guys I met at Columbia who had also left school at least for a year. Most of them went back. I never did. But it was kind—we were out of hand; it was kind of fun. But it was back in our hippy days and it was time to get out of there. And we knew my girlfriend, Jane, knew one guy out here was Bill Emerson who worked at the university in the math department. And he said "Well come on out. The skiing's great." So we packed up moved out and here we are. So she and I split up some years later. And then married to Mary Ann and have been for twenty-five years.

**SSC:** Is there anything else about your personal background that you think is relevant to nuclear issues that you'd like to mention now?



**SE:** No I wasn't cognizant of nuclear issues really other than the fact that everybody at my age did the duck and cover routine when they were as early as third grade. It was a little different I suppose in my part of the country than it might be in others because it was also—we did a lot of tornado drills. We were sort of in tornado alley but that was sort of blend together in my memory. I do remember the Cuban Missile Crisis as a kid and being scared about it but not having any real understanding. I guess I would have been nine years old. So it was one of those things where you fed off the fear that you felt coming from the adults around you more so than really understanding what was happening. I think I was a little more—older enough just a year later when President Kennedy was shot that that was much more I suppose a traumatic event for me than the Cuban Missile Crisis was. But I do remember it. I wasn't a down winder like folks out here. So wasn't really that aware of it. And then wound up working for the county for a few years in the late seventies—Salt Lake County—on social issues as a planner for the Department of Recreation and Multi-Purpose Centers—Community Centers. And during that time kind of got a taste of being involved in government and non-profit related work. Took a job then as Director of Big Brothers Big Sisters in 1980. And during the seventies being new out to the west I did a lot of camping and rock climbing. I minored in Geology at the University of Utah. And so I fell in love with the Great Basin, the West Desert, and of course the red rock country canyon country and did a lot of camping and hiking and just kicking around out in the mountains. Then along came the MX Missile System Proposal from President Carter in 1979. I'm just going to let that go—oops. Thanks. I just thought that this MX Missile was going to destroy the Great Basin. And then indeed it would have had it gone forward and this racetrack basin mode. And I volunteered to do

work with the MX Information Coalition. MX Center was a group of maybe twenty or thirty activists who were very much involved. We had a much broader network beyond that, but there were a core of a couple dozen people. That's where I met my wife Mary Ann in peace work and some of my best friends that I continue to see and care a great deal about here in the city come from that MX fight that we pushed back successfully against. That was when I became involved in nuclear issues. Wasn't just about the environment, but it became about the strategic folly of a missile system that would have created—made Utah a sponge for a nuclear attack. There was a Rube Goldberg kind of scheme and we were effective in pushing back against it. There was a broad movement. There were...

INTERRUPTION – PHONE RINGING

SE: Let me just pick this up.

SSC: Okay.

SE: Hello.

END OF TAPE

SE: Where were we?

SSC: You were mentioning about how you got involved with nuclear issues at first. So you anticipated my next question.

SE: Yeah the MX. I got to know people who live out in the Great Basin and Snake Valley in particular. Cecil Garland became a very good friend of mine. I got to know JoAnne Garrett who was running the grass roots effort—the Great Basin MX Alliance



out of Baker, Nevada. And I currently work with both Cecil and JoAnne now on the Las Vegas Water Grant. So it's funny it's the same old MX crowd that's fighting the Las Vegas pipeline today. Cecil and JoAnne are in their eighties. Bob Fulkerson's running PLAN Nevada, Progressive Leadership Alliance in Nevada. He was the head of Citizen Alert at that time. Citizen Alert was the Nevada corollary to the MX information center in Salt Lake City. It was a remarkable gathering of people who opposed the MX. There were generals, there were former CIA and other military leaders, there were ranchers, farmers, hippies, Mormons, Indians. The Indian tribes were critical in opposing that. Miners, mining associations, woolgrowers, cattlemen. It was quite an amazing coalition of people who came out in opposition to the MX. And eventually that opposition toppled it. They withdrew their proposal for the—President Reagan in October of 1981 cancelled the Racetrack Deployment System and then proposed that there be a dual track to our strategic plan at that time. And that was to deploy the MX missile, a smaller number of them—fifty rather than the original hundred that were planned in existing silos that were Minuteman silos that they would retrofit for the larger MX missile body in Colorado, Nebraska, and Wyoming out of Warren Air Force base near Cheyenne would be the headquarters for the MX deployment. And the second system was to be deployed potentially at the Dugway Proving Ground of what was called the Midgetman or the small ICBM. We called it the son of MX. And so I wound up fighting the MX deployment and the Midgetman deployment. Midgetman never happened. That project we fought it but in the end I think that that one was killed primarily by other forces, budget in particular, the Pershing missiles that were debated in Europe rather vociferously by the Europeans. And then they eventually by the agreements to move



forward with arms control between Gorbachev and Reagan at the time. So—but I wound up working for a group called Western Solidarity in opposition to the MX. It was—I think they paid me about \$350 bucks a month so it was a quartertime position. During the MX fight I wound up meeting Preston Truman and Monty Bright and they introduced me to the issues around the fallout from nuclear testing. J Truman was the head of the down winders. He and Irma Thomas and Michelle Thomas, Irma's daughter, and Claudia Peterson and a handful of—Elizabeth Wright, who was the daughter of the president of Dixie College—they were kind of the folks who started the fight—Irene Allen, Paul Jacobs and the nuclear gang. These were the folks who were fighting the—to get the information out that the testing had caused people downwind to get ill and die from cancers and leukemias, myelomas, lymphomas. And so I became sensitized to that. And once the MX fight was over I wound up working with the down winders as a volunteer first and then eventually as a contract employee for part-time along with the work I did for Western Solidarity. So I was kind of a gunslinger for peace if you will. [Laugh] And we did some rather remarkable stuff together in the mid-eighties. I wound up spending the summer organizing ranchers in the west desert, driving up and down every little valley in the central part of Nevada organizing against nuclear testing. We ran a build in—a resolution in the 1986 session of the legislature calling for a nuclear test ban treaty. We had Willard—Willem Kolff—Dr. Kolff was the—we called him the artificial organist. He was the—he created the first kidney dialysis machine, then was the head of the heart—artificial heart effort at the University of Utah. So he won the Japan prize. He was one of the *Life Magazine's* top fifty most influential people of the century—a remarkable guy and a very strong opponent of testing and an ally with us. And he

marched around up at the capital with a placard saying “Stop Nuclear Testing” and got thrown out of the building by the security guards. And we ran our bill up the flagpole and it got shot down sixty-five to three. [laughs] It was defeated. We’re going to try another one this session I think. In any event, involved in for the rest of the eighties and into the nineties with the down winders. During most of that time other than the period from about eighty-five to I’m going to say eighty-seven or eighty-eight, I had a day job. So I did other work. So I ran the Big Brothers Big Sisters from eighty to eighty-four. Then I wound up working with Utah issues as anti-poverty advocate for seven years in the late eighties through about ninety-four. Then in ninety-four I started a non-profit called Utah Housing Technical Assistance Program. Trying to get more low-income housing built around the state. Policies changed at the state and local level to facilitate inclusionary zoning and funding for more low-income and moderate-income housing. I still work on those issues. So much of the work I’ve done over the years on nuclear issues and chemical and biological weapons issues has been volunteer work.

**SSC:** Do you want to get some more water?

**SE:** A little throaty but I’ll go on.

**SSC:** I had two clarifying questions. You mentioned with the MX missile program that they were running a Goldman scheme? Is that what you called it?

**SE:** Rube Goldberg.

**SSC:** Oh Goldberg scheme, so I’m not sure what that is.

**SE:** Rube Goldberg was a cartoonist and his style—he created these contraptions. Like you’ve seen these things where engineering students have put together these remarkable ways to knock down dominos. And to have the ball goes this way and knocks over this



cup and this cup spills out this water that drains down and runs this Ferris wheel and that kind of stuff.

**SSC:** Right.

**SE:** So it was nonsensical contraption [laugh] and that was what the MX was. It was—it would have eaten up all of the valleys in from basically from Tooele west to the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Every single valley would have had missile silos in them. And the numbers of roads the amount of concrete was more—would have been the biggest public works project in the history of mankind had it been built. It was a ridiculous project [laugh] and well stopped. So you know that was what got me going. I wound up actually doing in the eighties as part of my travels I decided I was going to do an oral history. And so I interviewed all of these folks who had been involved in the MX fight, governors, congressman, ranchers, church leaders, activists in Salt Lake and in Nevada. And I eventually wound up donating that material to the University. So it's in the archive up there and some of the tapes that I did just like you're taping me now. So not unfamiliar with all of this process.

**SSC:** How would we access that?

**SE:** I honestly don't know. It's the Steven G. Erickson Archive at the American West Center Special Collection. So..

**SSC:** Look into it, definitely.

**SE:** Yeah, I haven't seen it since I handed it off. [Laugh] Hopefully somebody's archived it and catalogued it. Or at least I know that they were starting on it. Cause I got in contact with one of the students who was doing that. She found me and just wanted to



say “thank you for all you’ve done.” And I said “that’s lovely of you to—say”. And so it was very nice.

**SSC:** Great. My second follow up question was, when you were describing how you got involved in the process you said it wasn’t just the environment. And so I’m wondering, the implication there I think is, it was involving human health or human health is at risk.

**SE:** Yeah.

**SSC:** But I’m also so you know, um can you talk more about that, but also I guess you were politically active for environmental issues before that was the thing I was wondering about.

**SE:** No not really. I’ve always shied away from doing wilderness issues for instance.

There’s plenty of people doing that and I like wilderness too, but I was always more focused on the war and peace which is probably the single biggest environmental issue.

When you boil it down, war destroys environment as well as the humanity. So I’m an anti war activist is the way I perceive my work first and foremost. But it’s really all of a piece you know. It’s all one cloth lots of different fabrics, so it’s a social and economic justice approach. And that’s what Citizen’s Education Project started as to do not as an anti-nuclear issue but--or organization, but more as a social justice. In fact we started Citizen’s Education Project in 1998 I’m going to say. Me and two buddies from Junior’s Tavern [laugh] and my friend Rob says to me “Well when you—why don’t you do something worthwhile with your time and take on this private prison.” And I said “Well what are you talking about?” And during that session of legislature I’m pretty sure it was ninety-eight, they passed an appropriation to for two million dollars to build a private prison. And we got to looking into it and said well that’s just wrong to hand over people’s

freedom to a private corporation to make money off of their incarceration. So we formed this little non-profit between the three of us and took after it. And it took a couple years but we defeated the private prisons. Ran them out and there's no private prison in Utah yet. One of the few states that hasn't had a private prison built and operated. And we had to have things break our way, but we were a major reason why that project was defeated and the money rescinded. We worked with local people who were opposed to the places where they were proposed to build. But because of—so we formed this non-profit and thought “Well I've got all this expertise and institutional knowledge on these various other issues that nobody's taking on, so we'll just fold those into our portfolio of different things to do.” And so we worked on chem/bio issues and other stuff that I've been working on for years. And even the water grab in the last couple of years so. And I would say that our biggest fight and the only thing that ever really brought in any money, until the water grab, was a contract that we negotiated with Nevada, it was in 2002, to fight Yucca Mountain. And our objective was to try to swing the vote so Senator's Hatch and Bennett in the summer 2006. They paid us \$10,000 to work to try to get Hatch and Bennett to do the right thing for a change. And in the end we had them on a—in a spot where the White House had to put some window dressing on their vote—this is the Bush White House. And Bush was very much wanting approval of the senate for funding and moving forward with Yucca Mountain for storage of nuclear waste. And Hatch and Bennett had we been able to turn them I think it would probably turned the tide in the senate and Yucca Mountain would not have passed. So they trot out this premise that “Well we're not going to put any money into the private fuel storage, Goshute Skull Valley, temporary storage. We won't have any federal support for that. And you can use



that as your cover politically to go ahead and vote in favor of opening Yucca Mountain.” And they did. And of course we pointed out that that was all just window dressing because they’re never was to be any federal funding for the private fuel storage facility in Skull Valley. But that was one of the issues that we worked on with CEP and will continue to have some involvement in those nuclear related issues in the future for the little non-profit that could but had no money. So I’m jumping around a lot here, but just sort of one that came to mind.

**SSC:** No that’s great. How would you describe your current role in nuclear issue debates?

**SE:** Well fortunately with the HEAL having become a strong voice of the anti-nuclear movement, I’ve been able to focus elsewhere on other issues. I’ve always been a little bit ahead of things unfortunately. It’s just been the way it’s worked. So I’m moving on to do other things as well. But I work on—still want to see a test ban treaty signed by—ratified by the Senate. And I understand that’s on the Obama list of things to do this next year once health care is off the you know—is done for at least for the year. So some time next year he may submit it to the Senate and we’ve got to go back and get Hatch and Bennett again both of whom voted against the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty in 1999 I think. I think that’s right—ninety-eight, well might have been ninety-six. Anyway it was during the Clinton years. It’s time to revisit that. We thought we—I remember calling Bennett’s vote and the press calling it the second worst vote ever cast by a sitting Utah United States senator. The first worst being cast by his father Wallace Bennett who was Senator who voted against the Limited Test Ban Treaty which put nuclear tests underground and saved millions of lives. But so Senator Bennett’s been in a fine family tradition of



supporting the nuclear machine shall we. And we've got to disabuse him of that foolish notion. He's come around on Yucca Mountain reluctantly. Now he says well he won't support Yucca Mountain anymore late to the game, of course, but better late than never. So where were we?

**SSC:** I was asking how you would describe your role in this and so it seems like you...

**SE:** That's my role now. It's a little reduced but we'll be definitely involved with the test ban issue. I'm chagrined at the recent developments with the Energy Solutions.

Almost makes you want to have Cos come back and run Envirocare again. I worked on those issues for many years and with the Radiation Control Board and the Goshute deal same time. We opposed, I was probably the first to publicly oppose B&C waste proposal that Envirocare put forward in early nineties. And we collectively over a period of time with the emergence and then eventual preeminence of HEAL as leader in that fight were successful at keeping the B&C waste out that continues to be eroded by this new outfit, Energy Solutions and their desire to take all things nuclear out there with the depleted uranium which is just crazy because of the long lived of nature rather than becoming more benign as it decays it gets more radioactive. Eventually we're going to have a much greater Great Salt Lake. It's geologically inevitable that there will be—almost inevitable—a return of something similar to Lake Bonneville certainly enough to engulf the Energy Solutions site sometime in the distant geologic future. But this stuff's hot for tens of thousands to millions of years depending on the isotopes. So it's a foolish idea. But we've created this nuclear monster—let this genie out. And I don't know how you put it back in the bottle. We've always tried—I've always worked on the assumption that arms control is the way to go. We've got to not allow for expansion and proliferation of

nuclear weapons. And when you are producing this must waste that can be used for nuclear weapons by nation states and by terrorists potentially—rogue states certainly—it's time to put an end to the proliferation of the creation of nuclear materials. And so that means no more nuclear power as well. We've got to wean ourselves off of nuclear power and—it's in my opinion—and it's a dangerous technology that we've had a few disasters narrowly averted and one that wasn't. And we can't afford to have a repeat of Chernobyl; it's just unconscionable. So this new nuclear renaissance that HEAL has taken the lead on fighting, I'm a one hundred percent with them on that. But my energies primarily go in other directions so...

**SSC:** How does your organization plan to impact this test ban vote soon?

**SE:** Well I think we're going to work the politics. The people of the state of Utah are opposed to any resumption of nuclear testing certainly. Every poll we've ever seen going back to when we first starting working on down winder's issues in the early eighties has been overwhelmingly in favor of an end to testing. No more. We've passed resolutions in the legislature before calling for them to—calling for justice—calling for remembrance of the victims and survivors of the fallout. It's time now that our U.S. senators do the right thing on this issue and say "No more testing." Let's ratify the moratorium that's been in place now since George H. W. Bush was president. And let's move ahead with it. Let's get it on and get it done with and send the message to the world that we don't support proliferation and we don't support continued testing and we aren't going to build any more new weapons like bunker busters. And so we'll see if we can't get the Utah legislature to endorse that. We'll work over our senators when there's an opportunity for them to—once it's on the table from the Obama administration then we'll force the issue



the politics of it. I don't think there's any doubt that the citizenry is going to be in favor of the test ban treaty. So we'll work on that—on that angle of it. HEAL will probably wind up doing more of the grassroots outreach and heavy lifting. They've got the wherewithal financially to do that and we don't so.

**SSC:** So you've mentioned we've made this nuclear machine. And so...

**SE:** Count a hundred and four of them around the country—a hundred and three at least plus all of the DOE sites and they're planning on more, planning on new stream for making more warheads which is just insanity. But anyway...

**SSC:** So my question is what is the solution to this?

**SE:** Well we've got to go to the alternative energies that were first proposed under President Carter and then shelved by President Reagan. At one time had we gone down the path of solar and wind power and wave power and geothermal and other alternative energies which were supported strongly by the Carter administration subsidized in ways we've not since seen until just recently. We wouldn't be in this pickle right now. We'd have fewer nuclear power plants, we'd have less nuclear waste, we'd have much less reliance upon foreign sources of oil, we'd be the leader worldwide in the technologies and we're about to be surpassed if we aren't already by the Chinese. And so we're losing the opportunity to lead the world in renewable energies and energies that are not destructive of the environment and of human health like the nuclear cycle is. So it's—I think this nuclear renaissance is more hype than reality. I don't think the banks are going to finance it. It can't be competitive without massive subsidies. We shouldn't as a matter of policy and probably can't as a matter of finance come up with the money to subsidize a failed technology. We've been saying this for years. I remember going on radio and



television back and debating with—oh now I'm going to forget his name—your professor at the University, Gary Sandquist, about this back in 1985-86. At that time Forbes magazine came out with a spoof on the Time magazine cover, that the Time magazine was "God is dead" or "Is God dead?" and the Forbes magazine, the leading business magazine in the country, came out with a cover story that said "Is nuclear dead?" And it was at the time. We haven't built—haven't had a plant ordered since Three Mile Island. So it is being kept alive on life support but it's been a failed technology all along. It's a basically trying to figure out the most complicated way possible to boil water. That's what it is. And we've seen a lot of not just problems with the disposal of waste but with human health being damaged and people dying as a result of work in the uranium industry. Four Corners is replete with the victims of, especially on the Navajo reservation, people exposed to radon gas in their homes and the miners and the work in the unventilated tunnels, denied health benefits and denied compensation for all those years. So there's a fundamental injustice about all of this that goes with the nuclear cycle and can't be separated from it. You can't separate the peaceful atoms from the warhead either. So it's all of a piece.

**SSC:** Who is or will be affected by nuclear waste?

**SE:** Well future generations of Utahns will struggle with the concerns about Envirocare/Energy Solutions depending upon how and what they're allowed to take and how much of it. So these fights are really about the future for the state of Utah and its children and our grandchildren and great-grandchildren and posterity. We still haven't resolved what we're going to do with all the spent fuel rods. So they sit in parking lots at the plants right now. Which is what we've been arguing since the eighties was the way to

go until we came up with a permanent solution. Yucca Mountain was a crummy idea was politically driven rather than scientifically driven and so future generations are going to be left with this legacy. If we restart uranium mining we've got to make sure that—they're doing that already—and new mill is in the works for Utah and one more for Colorado and revamp, revitalizing the work at White Mesa which we fought for years. That's all happening now. Are we going to do a better job this time at protecting human health? We damn well better. Are we going to clean up the mess once we're done with it? We ought to. We didn't the last time. So these are questions that are very much today's issues as well as tomorrow's nightmares. So it's really important that citizens continue to oppose these developments like the importation of Italian waste. And even though it is "A" waste and relatively harmless and the chances of an accident being a problem are really small, it's just the principal of the matter. Why are we creating all of this? And if we're creating it, we got to be more responsible about taking care of it than we have been to date. There is a rule about disposal of "A" waste certainly. But we got to stop creating much of a stream of it as we have been. So it's basic reduce and reuse where possible. The issue of spent fuel rods is the one that we're not any closer to solving, and the proposals for reprocessing are really a bad idea. It creates actually larger volumes of waste. It certainly does allow for the potential for proliferation and use for the weapons cycle. It's really time to move in a different direction—past time. So hopefully we'll get past this period of national angst and line up behind these new technologies that are going to be our future and disband these old ones that are still providing jobs and income for many but are really last century's technology.



**SSC:** You mentioned we didn't clean up last time after we stopped uranium mining. I'm wondering who that we is? And sort of a sub question, who's responsible maybe more broadly for the nuclear situation that's going on currently?

**SE:** Well you know we'd like to say that we can go back and tag industry that left the mess behind when they closed up, but it's a little late for that. So it falls to the public to do it. We're finally getting about cleaning up the Atlas tailings on the Colorado River just north of Moab. But there are uranium mines that are still out there all over. I've poked around in a couple of them in various places in the San Rafael Swell and down in the Four Corners region there are—I don't know how many—I suppose that some of the folks at Oil Gas and Mining in the state of Utah would know. But it really needs to be a concerted effort to still clean up all of those and just mainly not create more. The—but as long as there's going to be more spent fuel rods created for more power plants we're going to need more uranium from someplace. Right now I don't know that it seems to me that this is a bit of a bubble that's been created in terms of uranium prices. Certainly was before when they ran the price up to \$140 bucks a pound and down and around ten back not so long ago. Maybe five years ago. But the grade of ore that's left down at Four Corners I don't think is competitive at the cost to get it with the Canadian ores. The Russians could dump uranium on the market if they wanted to, lots of it. So I don't know whether this is really a bubble or if there is going to be a sustained effort. But the public in the end is going to wind up taking it as taxes to clean up just like we have with Superfund and others. So it's likely that we'll wind up socializing the cost yet again. But still it needs to be done. And we need to make sure that if the industry is going to come back roaring and they are required to clean up after themselves this time because it will

boom it will bust again. If it booms it's going to bust. We just need to make sure that when the bust happens that there's money in the till to clean up and seal the mines so.

**SSC:** And so is that why you have elected to started a group focused on citizens.

**SE:** No that was more or less to continue to be able to have some kind of a platform on which to work these issues. It's less urgent because we've got a successful group like HEAL that's out there doing it, so I'm more inclined to want to work on water issues and still doing the anti-poverty stuff and some criminal justice reform. We're putting far too many people in prison for far too long for far too little. And while there's a legitimate place for incarceration, we do a terrible job of it. It's very racially biased. We don't help people reintegrate once they get out of the joint. And most do come back into society. We've got to do a better job of that whole system and boy is that an uphill fight with Utah legislature [laugh]. So it's not like I'm running away from the nuclear issues. It's just that others are with the youth and energy that I no longer have can take that on. And I'm comfortable with that. It's taken a while to let it go. Get ownership of some of these issues and they take ownership of you in a way. And so I have to recognize that there are young and talented people who want to work on this and God bless 'em. I'm glad they're there. The old guard does fade away. And so I'm not there yet but it's heartening to see younger people step up and take on these issues and take on these fights and be effective at it. So but we'll continue to do some of these that fall between the cracks. Nobody's paying attention to the activities at the Dugway Proving Grounds that I just, by default, I'm stuck with that one. And they're expanding their missions as we speak. Doubling the amount of testing they do on biological agents and that's dangerous stuff they're playing



with out there with very little oversight and lots of secrecy. So we'll continue to track that and try to pitch in where we can on these issues.

**SSC:** How would you like to see the story of nuclear issues or nuclear energy or nuclear proliferation end?

**SE:** Completely and tomorrow. [Laugh] I think likely you'll see the closing of nuclear power plants. I don't think we'll see new power plants built in this country. I think you'll see Europe weaning itself off of nuclear power. And some countries in Europe have already made that a policy direction. China on the other hand will likely see some building of new power—nuclear power in China. I think that's a disaster waiting to happen. It's like waiting for the next coal mine disaster in China. You know it's inevitable. I would think that someday we'll come up with some way to isolate the last of the fuel rods when we stop making them. But maybe I'm really optimistic there. I would hope that we would see a reduction of nuclear weapons down to a precious few, at least make progress for that perhaps even in my lifetime—maybe not. But I still think it's the single biggest issue I mean whether people want to talk global warming or financial meltdown, in the end its still about war and peace. And when you've got nuclear weapons that are still on a hair trigger alert, you still have enough of them to blow the planet to smithereens and most life on earth, as we know it, that's still the most important issue which is why a comprehensive test ban treaty is still a very critical public policy initiative that has to be completed—the process needs to be completed. And we in Utah hold important cards in that. So it's time now we're over the Bush hangover, and it's time to redirect. So I'm optimistic that we can get a test ban treaty ratified in the U.S. Senate this next year. That would be a big one. That would be a big one for the people of this state in

particular. It would be a relief for many and it would be a measure of justice that is still not out and still hasn't been delivered. That and healthcare would be the two things that would be most important to give as measures of justice for those who suffered and died and have survived the—our own little local holocaust brought to us by our own government.

**SSC:** What else would you like to add that I haven't asked about?

**SE:** Oh I don't know, it's a long history of stuff that I've been involved in and I can't remember it all. Some of it's been a lot of fun I must say. We had fun doing this. It wasn't just—sounds so grim to talk about. These weapons of mass destruction and all of it, but really it's been a gas working on it. Met with some amazing, remarkable people—regular folks and people who were rather well known. Some funny incidents with dragging the former head of the CIA, William Colby, around in the back of my Subaru and make jokes the now late Congressman Wayne Owen's expense. And we went to dinner. You know just all kinds of fun stuff that happened over the years. Fun during the MX fight—just been a lot of joy working on these issues as well as just what seems to be grindingly difficult work. And these are uphill fights, but they're well worth fighting. And it's about the journey more so than about the results in many respects. So I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to do this and the independence to be able to make a bit of a living out of it as well. Thankfully I've got a wonderfully supportive wife who actually makes the money around the household and allows me to do some of this work. So it's been an interesting way to make one's career. It's been more than just a job you see. So it's I suppose with locally in the parlance it would be a calling, and it's been a pleasure to have that opportunity. I would encourage others someday if they were



listening to this tape but if they're involved in this kind of work then bless them. And if they consider doing it, they ought to do it and then have fun doing it. So...

**SSC:** Is there anybody else in the area that you think we should contact to interview?

**SE:** Well I can't say that—start over. I would say that probably want to contact Preston Truman. Truman is cantankerous but he's my buddy and he taught me a great deal, and he knows more about the downwind issue than just about anybody alive. And he's a remarkable interview. So I'd say you want to talk to Jay—possibly my friend Stan Holmes. Stan ran the MX Information Center during 1979 to 1981. He's been a schoolteacher ever since. Teaches at Alta High School and he decided that the best way to influence issues like nuclear issues was to influence the next generations. So he's been a committed teacher of high school students and advanced placement students. And he'd be another one. Cecil Garland if you get the chance. Fought the MX—fought the electronic battlefield with him, fighting the water grab with him. He's not getting any younger. But those—he and JoAnne Garret in Baker, Nevada [Phone ringing] would be a couple of the people that I think are just role models and marvelous people and marvelous friends of mine, and you know I'm honored to be their pal. So these folks would be a couple I'd suggest.

**SSC:** Thank you.

**SE:** And I'd give you their numbers and all that stuff once we're off tape.

**SSC:** Great. Thanks.

**END OF INTERVIEW**

