

ENERGY

'Nuclear power is here to stay'

Energy Taxpayers Assoc. fights environmentalist suit

*On Saturday, April 28, a major pronuclear demonstration will be held in Grants, New Mexico which is expected to draw between 10,000 and 15,000 people. The rally is organized by the Energy Taxpayers Association of New Mexico, a group founded by Nacho Salizar, a local drilling company owner, to fight a lawsuit brought by the Friends of the Earth to block uranium mining in New Mexico. The suit, **Peshlakai v. Schlesinger**, seeks to stop all uranium mining until there is a full environmental*

Navajo tribe did not want to extend their leases, and would not put any more new land up for sale.... These companies told the people, "Right now we have plenty of work, but you guys watch out, two or three years down the road, things are going to get tough." Nobody really believed it. It was just like any other problem—everybody just sticks their head in the sand and hopes that it goes away. I wasn't contacted. I was just a small businessman and I was having enough trouble just getting started....

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

impact statement, in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1974. New Mexico and Wyoming are the two principal operational uranium mining areas in the United States, which provide uranium yellowcake to be made into nuclear fuel.

U.S. Senator Harrison Schmitt of New Mexico, New Mexico Governor Bruce King, Dr. D. Graham Foster of Los Alamos Laboratories, Larry McGrew from the Rocky Flats Nuclear Plant in Colorado, and other pronuclear spokesmen will speak at the demonstration.

The following interview with Nacho Salizar, head of the Energy Taxpayers Association, describes how he sees this fight.

EIR: *How did the Energy Taxpayers Association begin and why was the organization formed?*

Salizar: Okay. I'll tell you a little bit about myself, and when you see where I'm coming from, you will understand how a lot of people in Grants got to where they're at. I was born and raised in Mexico, and I came to the United States in 1967 and started working for a uranium company when I was 18 years old.... In 1975, we decided to take a step and form our own business, which is a drilling company.... There was a lot of work to be done, and we got our fair share of it. After the third year of business the operating companies—when I say operating companies, I mean Phillips, Mobil, Kerr McGee, United Nuclear, all the people that produce uranium—started getting worried about new leases, or extensions on the current leases they had. The

But, in the middle of 1978, I heard for the first time about this problem, which concerned Indian allotted lands, U.S. Forest Service lands, Bureau of Land Management land, and all the regulations that were being imposed on them, as far as... developing them and getting mine permits, and a whole stack of obstacles that were being thrown at the industry. And on Dec. 22, 1978, the Friends of the Earth filed a lawsuit against the Secretary of the Interior, the Secretary of the Department of Energy, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, the Tennessee Valley Authority, and all the different federal agencies involved in uranium production or leasing.... The attorneys included about 98 Navajo Indians on the Navajo reservation and got them to join in the lawsuit, which is called **Peshlakai v. Schlesinger**. Their big aim—their big beef really, is what it amounts to—is that the federal government did not require a national environmental impact study of what uranium yellowcake production would do to the United States.

We in this area believe that uranium production is already in, it's already underway, and that it shouldn't be stopped. But the Friends of the Earth want to stop further production. Where we come into that, as service people—like myself, and the banker, and the retail grocer and everybody in this area—we have all geared up for what's coming up in the next two, three, four, or five years. We have invested our money in uranium and in Grants, so if further production stops, if mine permits aren't issued, we are going broke. Those environmental impact statements that they're asking for are going to take 20 or 30 years to do, or a minimum of 10. You understand what that will mean. You know what happened to coal in 1972....

The way the lawsuit is worded, it just scared the pants off everybody. When I read it, it was so far reaching and so unreasonable that I didn't believe it. I thought, "those guys are crazy." What I call it is environmental hypocrisy. They do it with a complete disregard for people like myself. Things have been building up to this particular lawsuit; a demonstration here, a little one there, a complaint against a certain mining company, trying to stop mining, or milling, or drilling, or whatever. Every time I go to one of those meetings or one of those hearings, I'd waste one or two days. What I found consistently coming from the environmental people is misinformation, scare tactics, intim

lack of knowledge from the environmental people on whatever they were talking about. They were trying to tell me that what I was doing was criminal, that it was wrong, that I was hurting people and hurting myself. The way I look at it, I know what I'm doing, the people in Grants know what they're doing, they know what the consequences are in the uranium mines, in the mills, in the rigs, or whatever. You make up your own mind on what you want to do. ...

Well, I had worked too hard for what I had done, and my family, and all my friends, and the people who have worked for me have worked real hard to make me what I am and help our business come along the way it has. We went from 0 to 95 employees in three years, and I think it's a real accomplishment, and that it has helped a lot of underprivileged individuals. We employ almost 90 to 95 percent Mexican-Americans. The uranium industry in New Mexico has given the Mexican-American one of the breaks that we need to really get ahead, without having to be militant or Chicano-type people, or whatever. We work for it; if you do a good job, you get what you deserve.

So I decided to get involved, and I called a meeting of the local businessmen here in Grants and explained this lawsuit to them, and, being businessmen, they knew what was at stake, and I didn't have any trouble convincing them...It concerned them all, and we decided that we were going to do something about it. We called our congressional delegation; we got Congressman Harold Ronalds down here to address our organizational meeting on Jan. 26, and we had a turnout of about 500 people on a week's notice, and we presented the Congressman with over 2,000 petition signatures from one week. That gives you an idea of how the people reacted to it.

EIR: *Do you have support from all the people in Grants—the businessmen, the workers, the suppliers, the Mexican-Americans—more or less everybody except the Friends of the Earth?*

Salizar: The people here in Grants, who work around the fields, if I don't already have their support, all I have to do is talk to them for one minute and they're

with me. But I have not run into one person here who does not support the Energy Taxpayers Association. We called our first meeting on Jan. 21, and held our first organizational meeting on Jan. 26, and within a month, we were getting calls from throughout the state and throughout the country on what we were doing. One of our main objectives is to get this lawsuit exposed to the average citizen, and number one, to tell the businessmen what it is going to do to them....

Of course, there are some environmentalist types here in Grants who believe that nuclear power is dangerous and is bad; they're the hardcore radicals and I am never going to convince them, and I'm not trying to. What I'm trying to do is to get the message to the silent majority, and to tell them it's time to get off their duff and go out there and fight like hell.

EIR: *How many people are you expecting at the Energy Day in Grants on April 28?*

Salizar: We're expecting between 10,000 and 15,000. The town is about 18,000 to 20,000. The entire industry is going to shut down for this day and we're going to get a lot of outside people from Gallup, Farmington, Santa Fe, Albuquerque, all the surrounding towns....

EIR: *What kind of press coverage have you gotten in the national press?*

Salizar: Let me start at the local end. Here in Grants, we get excellent coverage. The Gallup paper has helped us. The Farmington paper has helped us. We are having a lot of trouble getting press coverage from the Albuquerque papers; we are having trouble getting coverage from the Albuquerque TV stations, which service the entire state and southern Colorado. We have gotten national coverage in the trade magazines, but no coverage from any national networks or wire services.

EIR: *Have you gotten coverage from any papers in the Southwest, in Texas, Denver?*

Salizar: No.

EIR: *Why do you think that a few environmentalists can do something and it's national news and you may pull together a demonstration of 15,000 and it isn't?*

Salizar: I can't answer that question. I went to one particular hearing that the environmentalists put on. The industry was there and the environmentalists were there. They had about 40 or 50 people there and we had about 50 or 100 people there, depending on what time it was. The entire network system was there to cover it for the state. And any time the environmentalists talked, the cameras came up, and any time we got on—I guess we're too straight or something, dressed up to make a presentation the way protocol calls for it—we don't get any coverage....Unless we call a press conference or physically almost drag them over to where we are, they won't cover us.

EIR: *Does this make you think that there is a kind of conspiracy to exaggerate the influence of the environmentalists?*

Salizar: I don't know if it's a conspiracy or not, but during this Three Mile Island mishap, one of the officials said, as far as the press is concerned, on TV, on the 6 o'clock news, it is more exciting to film a fire truck going around the plant doing nothing but raising a lot of hell than it would be to show an engineer with blueprints trying to figure out what is going on.

EIR: *There are basically two views on energy. There's the traditional American view that any shortage can be solved, and that we solve problems through R and D and we continue to grow, and there's the view that there is an energy shortage which can't be solved and therefore we have to conserve and stop growing. It seems that this is the view adopted in Schlesinger's program. What do you think?*

Salizar: Well, that's a heavy question and I think a lot about that when I am by myself. I think that even though there might not be an energy shortage right now, and it might be a false one, that there will be, and I think that it is going to take conservation plus new technology, new methods, and that we're just going to have to keep going the way we are. I don't think that the American people are the type of people to just say: "Hey, this is it, we might as well face it, we are going to run out of energy, we are going to stop growing." All of our lives, we're trained to follow the American dream, that you work hard and that you get the fruits of your work, so that as long as you have people who are like that, if we don't do it, our kids will do it, and they'll find something new, and I am very confident of that. As far as there being an energy shortage now, I don't know. I can't answer that question.

EIR: *Some nuclear experts, like Jon Gilbertson of Fusion magazine, say that they think the Three Mile Island incident was sabotage, and Professor Rasmussen of MIT, the nuclear safety expert...asserted that there was a .99994 percent chance of sabotage given the string of occurrences. Do you think that the possibility of sabotage should be investigated?*

Salizar: In my own mind, and I am not speaking for the Energy Taxpayers Association,...I'm positive that there was sabotage. I don't know how to prove it; but just the way things are happening, and all of a sudden this big attack on nuclear power—"The China Syn-

drôme" and everything—in my mind, there is no doubt about it...I think that the environmentalists would stop at nothing to do away with nuclear power....

One other thing that we are going to work on, and that we are pointing out as much as we can, is the fact that antidevelopment people, antinuclear people, environmentalists—I categorize them all the same way—have infiltrated the federal government, the state government and local government, to positions where they can dictate policy. Now we have a situation where lawyers and people who work for the Sierra Club, Friends of the Earth, the Natural Resources Defense Council or whoever, that file lawsuits against the government to stall or postpone or cancel big projects like dams, nuclear reactors, mining or whatever, the same lawyers who filed these lawsuits and drew them up and worked with the environmentalists are now defending them, as they now work for the Department of the Interior, or the Department of Energy or President Carter. I think that this is conflict of interest of the worst kind.

EIR: *What do you think of the potential for cooperation between the United States and Mexico, with its very ambitious plan for industrial development?*

Salizar: I'm from Mexico, so I can tell you a little bit about how the Mexican people think. Mexico is developing well. The people are getting educated, the younger people are going to be in power within 10 or 20 years and you have less corruption, less graft, and more intelligent people running the show....

What the Mexican government is trying to do from what I can tell, as I look at it from the outside, is that they are willing to cooperate with us. They are willing to sell us whatever we need, but they are going to do it on their terms. They are going to do it to benefit Mexico, not to benefit the United States.... They have seen the problems that have developed in the Middle East, and what they are going to ask us to do is: "OK, you want to sell us drilling rigs, you manufacture them in Mexico and put the Mexican people to work, and we'll let you work over here and we'll sell you the oil. We'll sell you the oil as fast as we want to produce it; not as fast as you demand it. It will make the American people realize that just because Mexico has the oil it doesn't mean we can have it. They can sell it somewhere else. We are going to see a big influx of foreign technology in Mexico and everywhere in the world....