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## Review of "Nuclear Nebraska: The Remarkable Story of the Little County That Couldn't Be Bought." By Susan Cragin.

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*Nuclear Nebraska: The Remarkable Story of the Little County That Couldn't Be Bought.* By Susan Cragin. Foreword by U.S. Senator Ben Nelson. New York: AMACOM Books, 2007. xxvii + 271 pp. Illustrations, map, notes, index. \$24.95.

For nearly twenty-five years after Congress passed the 1980 Federal Low-Level Radioactive Waste Policy Act, Nebraska was torn by controversy over where a waste dump should be spotted in the state. The final act came in 2005, when Nebraska sent \$146 million in damages to the five-state Central Compact Commission in charge of constructing the facility. Nothing was built.

Susan Cragin's book is a highly readable, well-researched, and very one-sided look at the uproar that cost all those millions of dollars, left a small Great Plains county irredeemably split, and caused years of newspaper headlines, angry meetings and hearings, and protests that verged on the violent. One side even had an arsenal of four hundred automatic weapons, ready for war. There were explosions and state troopers called out.

It seemed so simple. Congress passed a law encouraging states to join in regional compacts to find a place to bury low-level civilian nuclear waste. The nation was running out of space at designated sites, and something had to be done. Nebraska joined Kansas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, and Arkansas in the Central Compact and quickly became the favored state to host the site as its two nuclear plants produced the most waste.

But then came the dreaded NIMBY—Not In My Back Yard—angry firestorm from antidump activists who protested each proposed site in the state. When Boyd County, a small northeast Nebraska county on the South Dakota border, was finally designated, the battle began in earnest.

This is not a neutral book. Susan Cragin is clearly sympathetic to the dump opponents. She stayed in their homes, ate dinner with them, and lived their lives for weeks and months. She has a firm understanding of the

issues, the emotions, and the culture of the county. She tells their story in dramatic narrative but has little to do with the dumpsite supporters, although she includes their stories as well.

And it is a very dramatic story: about a dedicated cadre of grandmothers, professionals, angry young men, farmers, and many more. They must earn an informal graduate degree in all the technical aspects of the controversy, raise money for travel and campaigns, and spend uncounted hours opposing the site. They lose friendships and many become physically and mentally disturbed over it all.

But in the end the opponents prevail. The site, pretty clearly, is unfit for its purpose. New ways of disposing of the nuclear waste became available, with much less produced. And no other compact in the nation is going to create a site, either. Congress had enacted a failed policy.

*Nuclear Nebraska* names names. Four governors were involved, along with many state bureaucrats, legislators, and citizens. Reputations were made and lost in this battle. People were fired from their jobs and one central figure went to prison. It was a controversy that occupied the news media for years.

And in Boyd County, the dedicated band of protestors soldiered on, always facing imminent defeat, wracked with divisions among their own group, and feeling deep despair as well as joyous success. It is a bold and engaging story.

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