

## Trump budget contains \$120M to restart licensing of Yucca Mountain

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WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump renewed his commitment to restart licensing on the controversial Yucca Mountain nuclear repository in Nevada on Monday with a funding request tucked into a \$4.4 trillion budget blueprint.

Trump included \$120 million to restart licensing on the geologic site north of Las Vegas, as well as to establish an interim storage program to address the growing stockpile of nuclear waste produced by power plants in states across the nation.

The funds are just part of the \$30.6 billion budget request for the Department of Energy for fiscal year 2019, which begins Oct. 1.

Energy Secretary Rick Perry said the \$120 million would be used for the licensing application process. Application hearings must be held to hear challenges by Nevada and other stakeholders.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission must determine whether Yucca Mountain is safe for long-term storage, and issue a license for Energy to build the repository.

“We have a legal responsibility. We have this waste out there. We need to have this licensing issue addressed,” Perry said Monday.

The NRC also is seeking more than \$47.7 million for the licensing process at Yucca Mountain, which was designated by Congress in 1987 as the sole site to permanently store nuclear waste. The licensing process was halted during the Obama administration.

Nevada Gov. Brian Sandoval, the state's two senators, Republican Dean Heller and Democrat Catherine Cortez Masto, and Democratic Reps Dina Titus, Jacky Rosen and Ruben Kihuen oppose the Yucca Mountain project.

Rep. Mark Amodei, R-Nev., and Nye County, where Yucca Mountain is located, and other rural Nevada counties, support continuing the licensing process.

### **Delegation reacts**

Although the House has backed efforts to restart licensing on Yucca Mountain, the Senate did not approve funding last year.

"Despite Congress' refusal to fund the Yucca Mountain project, the administration is once again prioritizing it," Heller said. He claims the project poses a threat to the people of southern Nevada and could have a catastrophic impact on the tourism economy.

"I've made it clear why Nevada does not want to turn into the nation's nuclear waste dump," Heller said.

Cortez Masto said it is a disgrace that the president and some members of Congress continue to seek taxpayer money for the project.

"Proponents of Yucca Mountain have already wasted more than \$15 billion on a hole in the ground and have nothing to show for it," Cortez Masto said.

Members of Nevada's congressional delegation also oppose another Trump administration public land program proposal.

The \$11.7 billion budget for the Department of Interior includes a proposal to take \$230 million in unobligated balances from the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act program. The money is generated from the sale of public land.

Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke told reporters the budget has a strong focus on rebuilding national parks and addressing a backlog of repairs to roads and visitor facilities.

There is a \$11.6 million maintenance backlog within the National Park Service alone, he said.

Zinke said there is \$600 million in the Southern Nevada land program. The \$230 million reduction would take place over a three-year period and would not end the program, he said.

The Southern Nevada land management program allows the Bureau of Land Management to sell land near Las Vegas and use those proceeds on conservation and restoration projects under a federal-state-local partnership.

More than \$3.4 billion has been spent on 1,200 projects throughout Nevada since 1998.

Rosen said the budget proposal from Interior would “rob” Southern Nevada of a revenue source for “our state’s education system, water authority and projects that protect and maintain our public lands.”

“The Trump budget also attacks the heart of our community,” added Titus. “The successful Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act, which has paid for the restoration of Red Rock Canyon, bike trails, and other parks, would be defunded in order to pay for the president’s misplaced priorities, including his great wall along our southern border.”

### **Budget blueprint**

But the Trump administration’s priority to restart the licensing process at Yucca Mountain prompted the most reaction from Nevada lawmakers Monday.

Presidential budget blueprints have traditionally been a wishlist of projects and spending that Congress alters during the authorization and appropriations process.

The Trump administration sought \$120 million for DOE to jumpstart the licensing process last year. The House upped the figure to \$150 million, to include an interim storage process, but Senate budget writers zeroed out the request in its spending bill.

Nye County Commissioner Dan Schinhofen applauded the Trump administration’s effort to continue the licensing process on the Yucca Mountain repository, which is not completed, to determine if the site “is even safe for its construction.”

“All the president’s budget does is allow for the science to be heard on the safety of Yucca Mountain,” Schinhofen said.

Senate GOP candidate Danny Tarkanian, a Las Vegas lawyer, also said he supports the administration priority to license Yucca Mountain as a permanent repository.

Tarkanian said building the facility would prompt a boost in federal spending and job creation in the state, and position Nevada for nuclear waste reprocessing.

But congressional lawmakers from Southern Nevada said opposition to the project would continue.

Rep. Ruben Kihuen, D-Nev., said the money would be better used on research and development on renewable energy technology.

Titus said the \$120 million would be “a tiny down payment on a project that will cost \$100 billion and ship nuclear waste through hundreds of congressional districts across the country.”

Las Vegas Mayor Carolyn Goodman, at the White House for an announcement on the president’s infrastructure plan, told the Review-Journal that while she did not talk to Trump about Yucca Mountain, she said nuclear waste could not be shipped there until improvements are made.

“You dare not send it to Yucca until the infrastructure’s fixed,” Goodman said.

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