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Plan to revive Yucca Mountain to get first hearing in Congress

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WASHINGTON — A House energy committee has scheduled a hearing next week to begin the legislative process to revive the mothballed Yucca Mountain nuclear repository in Nevada.

Rep. Greg Walden, R-Ore., the chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, said Wednesday that legislation on a comprehensive solution to nuclear waste management policy would be the subject of the hearing.

The hearing by the environment subcommittee, under Chairman John Shimkus, R-Ill., would examine the federal government's responsibility to dispose of nuclear waste from plants across the country.

Walden said the hearing would provide the first opportunity to hear from stakeholders about legislation to revive the Yucca Mountain facility and other means of storing waste addressed in the draft legislation.

"This proposal was thoughtfully developed through an extensive record of hearings and other oversight over the past six years to identify what may be needed to strengthen the Nuclear Waste Policy Act," Walden said in a statement.

"Now it is time to get our nation's nuclear waste management policy back on track through consideration of this legislative proposal," he said.

Rep. Dina Titus, D-Nev., said she would "continue to fight any and all attempts to turn Nevada into the dumping ground for the nuclear industry."

Yucca Mountain was designated as a permanent site for nuclear waste disposal by Congress in 1982. More than \$15 billion was spent to prepare the site, located 90 miles north of Las Vegas, to accept waste from nuclear energy-generating plants.

President Barack Obama, at the behest of then-Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., defunded the program in 2012. The Department of Energy under the Obama administration declared the site unworkable.

But the DOE and Congress have yet to identify another site for permanent storage. And nuclear wastes continue to be stored temporarily at the plants and other locations.

President Donald Trump, in his fiscal 2018 budget blueprint, included \$120 million to revive Yucca Mountain and develop interim storage sites.

The state of Texas, which has a nuclear power plant, has filed a lawsuit to force the federal government to adhere to the 1980s legislation and permanently dispose of the waste. Nevada has responded to that lawsuit.

Nevada Gov. Brian Sandoval, the state's congressional delegation and the Nevada Legislature have vowed to fight federal plans to revive the Yucca Mountain site. The state has denied the federal government water rights at the facility.

Several Nevada counties, including Nye County where Yucca Mountain is located, have encouraged continued studies, despite the political opposition.

Energy Secretary Rick Perry toured this mothballed facility recently, and then met with Sandoval in Las Vegas. Both acknowledged a personal friendship. Sandoval endorsed Perry in his failed Republican presidential nomination battle eventually won by Trump.

There are more than 30 nuclear-power generating sites across the country, including several in Illinois.

Shimkus has argued that the government has neglected its obligation under the Nuclear Policy Waste Act to dispose of the waste at the designated Yucca Mountain site.

Titus said the hearing next week, and the legislation drafted by Shimkus, "may satisfy his donors, but Nevada is not for sale."

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STORING NUCLEAR WASTE

— The 1982 Nuclear Waste Policy Act called for the federal government to provide a permanent repository for nuclear waste generated by non-military reactors nationwide.

— Designated by Congress as the site for storage, Yucca Mountain was designed to hold commercial nuclear waste deep underground for 1 million years.

— The Yucca Mountain storage facility was defunded in 2012 by President Barack Obama.

— There are about 77,000 tons of nuclear waste being temporarily stored at various facilities.

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