

Dianne Feinstein

United States Senator for California

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Senate Coalition Introduces Comprehensive Nuclear Waste Legislation

Washington—U.S. Sens. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.), Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.), Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska), and Lamar Alexander (R-Tenn.) today introduced bipartisan legislation to safeguard and permanently dispose of the nation's stockpiles of spent nuclear fuel, which are currently accumulating at separate sites across the country.

"The United States desperately needs a comprehensive nuclear waste policy. We simply cannot allow spent nuclear fuel to remain indefinitely at sites scattered throughout the country, stored at taxpayer expense, awaiting a clear path forward," said Sen. Feinstein, ranking member on the Appropriations Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development. "Our bill is rooted in a consent-based process, which means interim and permanent facilities will only be sited where they are welcome by state and local governments. The only way a waste policy can work is if the local communities are on board. This is a bipartisan approach, consistent with the recommendations of the Blue Ribbon Commission, and it is long overdue."

"I appreciate my colleagues' recognition that dealing with our nation's defense waste - more than half of which exists at the Hanford Nuclear Reservation in Washington - is an important priority. I look forward to a dialogue that helps break the gridlock in a manner that's guided by sound science and the important principles laid out by the Blue Ribbon Commission," said Senator Maria Cantwell, ranking member of the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

"Nuclear energy is a vital part of America's energy portfolio and for far too long, the American taxpayer has been on the hook for the federal government's failure to implement an effective plan to handle the back-end of the nuclear fuel cycle," said Sen. Murkowski, chairman of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee. "This legislation is an important step toward advancing the use of nuclear power in America."

"If we want to continue to have low-cost, clean power from nuclear reactors, which today produce about 60 percent of our country's emission-free electricity, then we have to have a place to put the used nuclear fuel. That means we need to end the stalemate over what to do with our country's nuclear waste by finding a way to create both temporary and permanent storage sites that would complement other solutions," said Sen. Alexander, chairman of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development. "This legislation, which is consistent with the president's Blue Ribbon Commission, would do that by allowing state and local governments to compete for these facilities and the good-paying jobs that come with them."

Among the provisions in the Nuclear Waste Administration Act of 2015 are:

Nuclear Waste Administration

- Establishes an independent agency to manage the country's nuclear waste program in place of the Department of Energy. This Agency would be headed by an administrator appointed by the

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president and subject to Senate confirmation.

Consent-Based Process for Consolidated Storage Facilities and a Repository

- Directs the agency to build a pilot storage facility to hold spent fuel from decommissioned nuclear power plants and emergency shipments from operating plants.
- Directs agency to build consolidated storage facilities for non-priority spent fuel for utilities or defense wastes for DOE on a temporary basis.
- Establishes siting processes for storage facilities and repositories.

Linkage Between Storage Facilities and Repository

- Authorizes administrator to begin siting a pilot storage facility for priority waste immediately, and does not set waste volume restrictions on storage.
- Provides that for 10 years following enactment, the administrator may continue to site new storage facilities for non-priority waste as long as funds have been obligated to carry out a parallel repository program.
- After 10 years, the administrator may site new storage facilities only if at least one site has been selected for evaluation as a potential location for a permanent repository.

Nuclear Waste Fund

- Establishes a new working capital fund in the U.S. Treasury, into which the fees collected from the utilities would be deposited.
- These funds will be available to the administration without further appropriation. Fees already collected remain in the Nuclear Waste Fund, where they will continue to be subject to appropriation.

Defense Wastes

- Authorizes Secretary of Energy to revisit decision to commingle defense waste with commercial spent fuel.
- If the Secretary determines that separate waste facilities are necessary or appropriate for efficiently managing defense wastes, the Administrator may site, construct, and operate one or more facilities for that purpose in accordance with the siting-concurrence process in the act.

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