



Yucca Mountain placement in Trump budget draws ire from congressional delegation, Nevada leaders

<https://thenevadaindependent.com/article/yucca-mountain-placement-trump-budget-draws-ire-congressional-delegation-nevada-leaders>

By Megan Messerly, Riley Snyder and Michelle Rindels

Yucca Mountain is back on the table.

A recently-released summary of the White House's fiscal 2018 budget plan calls for \$120 million to restart licensing activities for the long-stalled nuclear waste dump in Nye County, about 90 miles outside of Las Vegas. Most of Nevada's congressional delegation stands in staunch opposition to the proposal. Former Democratic Sen. Harry Reid led the charge in opposing Yucca Mountain as Senate Democratic leader.

But, because Reid played such a significant role using his clout and knowledge of Senate rules to effectively kill the proposal, his retirement threw into question whether Nevada's congressional delegation would be able to stave off Yucca on its own. The budget proposal is the first indication that the White House may consider the site as a long-term solution to the problem of where to dispose the country's nuclear power plant waste.

"These investments would accelerate progress on fulfilling the Federal Government's obligations to address nuclear waste, enhance national security, and reduce future taxpayer burden," the budget summary states.

Nevada's U.S. senators, Republican Dean Heller and Democrat Catherine Cortez Masto, sent a joint letter to Energy Secretary Rick Perry and Director of the Office of Management and Budget Mick Mulvaney to express their "vehement opposition" to the inclusion of the \$120 million.

"Governor (Brian) Sandoval has made clear the State of Nevada will contest over 200 elements of any license application, which would likely take years to resolve and cost federal government over \$1.6 billion," they wrote. "Rather than attempting to force this project on our constituents, it is clear U.S. taxpayers' dollars would be better spent identifying viable alternatives for the long-term storage of nuclear waste in areas that are willing to house it."

Cortez Masto pressed Energy Secretary Rick Perry during his confirmation hearings over his plans for the nuclear waste site. In voting for Perry's confirmation, Cortez Masto said she believed that Perry "understands the importance" of the Yucca issue to Nevada and is someone she "can work with to ensure Yucca Mountain never sees the light of day."

Nevada officials have estimated that licensing proceedings would take multiple years. The Department of Energy estimated in 2008 that a 10-year licensing process could cost \$1.66 billion.

Voters still largely oppose the project, according to a recent [Nevada Independent poll](#). Thirty-three percent of likely voters said they favored storing nuclear waste at Yucca to 58 percent opposed, according to a January poll conducted by the Mellman Group.

President Donald Trump didn't publicly take a stance on the project during the 2016 campaign, telling KSNV anchor Jim Snyder in October that he didn't have an opinion on the project.

"I'm very friendly with this area. I have the hotel here; I will tell you I'm going to take a look at it because so many people here are talking about it. I'll take a look at it, and the next time you interview me, I'll have an answer," he said.

Nevada Gov. Brian Sandoval has long opposed the project, telling members of congress in a 2015 letter that there was "[nothing for Nevada to negotiate](#)." He told the [Las Vegas Review-Journal](#) after the 2016 election that his position wouldn't change regardless of what tack the Trump administration planned to take on the site.

"As far as I am concerned the state will continue to aggressively oppose the siting of storage of high-level nuclear waste there," he said.

The Nevada Independent has reached out to the governor, state lawmakers, the congressional delegation and local officials for their reaction to the news that the White House is taking steps to revive the Yucca proposal. We will update this article with their reactions as we receive them.

Republican Gov. Brian Sandoval: “Regarding Yucca Mountain, let me make my position clear – for the remainder of my term I will vigorously fight the storage of high-level nuclear waste in Nevada. Any attempt to resurrect this ill-conceived project will be met with relentless opposition, and maximum resources. Continuing down a path that seeks to force this unsafe and unwanted project on Nevada is a waste of time and money and only gets the country farther away from solving its nuclear waste problem. I encourage the President to give the nuclear waste problem the same review process he has successfully applied to flawed contracts and government proposals so far.” (In a statement on March 16.)

Republican Attorney General Adam Laxalt: “Nevada will continue to litigate this matter aggressively and fully. We have many strong claims against the proposed nuclear repository. If the Trump administration continues along this path, we expect many years of protracted litigation in which we are confident we will ultimately prevail.” (In a statement on March 16.)

Republican Sen. Dean Heller: “As has been stated in the past, Yucca is dead and this reckless proposal will not revive it. Washington needs to understand what Nevada has been saying for years: we will not be the nation’s nuclear waste dump. This project was ill-conceived from the beginning and has already flushed billions of taxpayer dollars down the drain. Members of both parties keep trying to revive this dead project via the budget and appropriations process, but I will continue to fight those efforts (In a statement on March 16.)

Democratic Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto: “Trump’s attempt to revive Yucca Mountain is naïve and would be a colossal waste of taxpayer money. Recent reports estimate that licensing hearings alone would cost more than \$1.6 billion dollars. Yucca Mountain is nothing more than a hole in the ground and will never be a viable solution for dealing with nuclear waste. Nevadans know this and they have been clear that they do not want a nuclear dumping site in their back yard. That is why earlier this year; I worked with Senator Dean Heller and the Nevada Congressional delegation to introduce legislation to keep Yucca Mountain from being resurrected and require that any discussions of sites for nuclear repositories include the states and key stakeholders. I will continue to work with Governor Sandoval and my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to fight against this and any other attempt to revive this reckless project.” (In a statement on March 16.)

Democratic Congresswoman Dina Titus: “As the Trump Administration continues to crumble, this budget proposes to spread the chaos across the federal government and starve or eliminate the institutions representing our

core values. It would invest \$120 million on the failed Yucca Mountain boondoggle while slashing programs that feed our homebound seniors, keep our air clean, and educate our children.” (In a statement on March 16.)

Republican Congressman Mark Amodei: “The fact of the matter is that Nevadans cannot simply ignore Yucca Mountain and think it is off the table. Many Americans throughout the nation continue to work to open the facility and bring it online. Instead, we should work to dictate the terms of the repository under the best conditions for our state. This facility has the potential to not only be a job creator in Nye County, but also throughout the state if done properly.” (From his [website](#).)

Democratic Congressman Ruben Kihuen: “Yucca Mountain has been dead for years. Now, President Trump wants to run roughshod over the people of Nevada and throw away funding that could be better spent on infrastructure and creating jobs. Nevada is not a dumping ground for the rest of the country’s nuclear waste and our rights shouldn’t be trampled over just because President Trump wants to put an unsavory waste facility in our backyard. The Nevada delegation was united in sponsoring the Nuclear Waste Informed Consent Act earlier this year, demanding that states be consulted before nuclear waste repositories can be built by the federal government. I urge President Trump and Secretary Perry to reconsider their reckless and haphazard scheme to throw away federal tax dollars, especially without thinking about the safety and well-being of the people of Nevada.” (In a statement on March 16.)

Democratic Congresswoman Jacky Rosen: “Worst of all, the budget requests \$120 million in funds for Yucca Mountain to make our state the country’s dumping ground for nuclear waste ... I will fight alongside Nevada’s delegation to put a stop to nuclear waste from ever being dumped in our backyard. I will work with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to make sure that our fiscal house is in order and that vital programs that affect our economy, safety, and the health of our citizens will continue to receive funding.” (In a statement on March 16.)

Democratic Senate Majority Leader Aaron Ford: “I am disappointed that the Trump administration is arrogantly choosing to ignore the fact that Nevadans don’t want dangerous nuclear waste dumped on our state. Our federal congressional delegation must stand united to block this ill-conceived proposal.” (In a statement on March 16.)

Democratic Assembly Speaker Jason Frierson: “Unfortunately, the White House is completely ignoring the will and the safety of Nevadans. Storing nuclear waste 100 miles from Las Vegas in an unstable and unsuitable

environment is incredibly dangerous, not to mention that it will threaten the lifeblood of our economy—tourism. All of Nevada's elected officials should stand united with our federal delegation to work together across party lines to stop this and protect every Nevadan. I'm also looking to our Attorney General to follow through with his commitment to advocate for state's rights by fighting any effort to force this on Nevadans." (In a statement on March 16.)

Republican Senate Minority Leader Michael Roberson: "I am adamantly opposed to Yucca Mountain being used as a site to store nuclear waste. Politicians from outside Nevada have tried for 30 years to dump their waste into our beautiful state. Their attempts to 'Screw Nevada' have consistently failed and I am confident they will continue to fail. I look forward to a speedy vote on AJR10, for which I am a co-sponsor, telling Washington to keep their waste out of Nevada." (In a statement on March 16; Democratic Assemblyman Chris Brooks's resolution, [AJR10](#), opposes the Yucca Mountain project.)

Republican Assembly Minority Leader Paul Anderson: "I am adamantly opposed to licensing Yucca Mountain for a nuclear waste repository. I am against it for the safety of all Nevadans, and I am against it because of the enormous risk we would be taking with our recovering economy and the threat this might pose to tourism in southern Nevada. This project died a long time ago — it should stay dead. I stand with Governor Sandoval and Senator Heller in fighting to keep this dangerous and reckless proposal from coming to fruition." (In a statement on March 16.)

Nye County Commission Chairman Dan Schinhofen: "With the news that President Trump has put \$120 million in his budget to restart the hearings on Yucca Mountain, the host area Nye County couldn't be more pleased. We have advocated for the rule of law and National Security now for 30-plus years. The expected responses from the State's delegation in Washington D.C. was not surprising, 'boondoggle, dumping ground' and 'bad science.' One federal representative from Nevada went as far as to say the plan is to 'throw away funding that could be better spent on infrastructure and creating jobs.' It is Nye County's contention this funding will do just the opposite: re-establish well-paying jobs that were lost, create new high-tech and construction jobs and strengthen Nevada's infrastructure. It is far past the time for such political science and now is the time for real science to be heard." (In a statement on March 16.)

Clark County Commissioner Chris Giunchigliani: "It's shameful that we're having to deal with this one more time," Giunchigliani said Thursday morning. She vowed to continue the fight against being the nuclear-waste dumping

ground. “The president should have been more sensitive to the long-term fight ... This has been just unfortunate that they’re trying to dump this all on the back of the state of Nevada. We’re a very unique area.”

Clark County Commission Chairman Steve Sisolak: “I’m disappointed obviously,” he said Thursday morning. “I’ll do everything I can to continue the fight against Yucca Mountain. I think it’s important not just for our citizenry now but for our future generations.”

Las Vegas Mayor Carolyn Goodman: “Yucca Mountain has always been a flawed proposal for many reasons, and as mayor of Las Vegas safety is my number one priority. It is too dangerous to transport nuclear waste through highly populated cities like mine or any other. This is why a waste site at Yucca Mountain is more than a Nevada issue, it is a national safety concern. Our infrastructure in this country is in terrible disrepair, and this highly dangerous material will be rolling past population centers across the nation. That’s not a risk I am willing to take for my city or for our country.” (In a statement on March 16)

Read the full letter from Cortez Masto and Heller to Perry and Mulvaney below:

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 16, 2017

The Honorable James Richard "Rick" Perry
Secretary of Energy
U.S. Department of Energy
1000 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington D.C. 20585

The Honorable John Michael "Mick" Mulvaney
Director
Office of Management and Budget
725 17th Street, N.W.
Washington D.C. 20503

Dear Secretary Perry and Director Mulvaney:

We write to express our vehement opposition to the inclusion of \$120 million, in part that would be utilized to restart licensing activities for the Yucca Mountain nuclear waste repository, in the Department of Energy's fiscal year 2018 budget request. As we discussed in your confirmation meetings, it is clear our nation cannot fully move forward with viable sustainable solutions for spent nuclear fuel and defense high-level waste without moving past Yucca Mountain. This request simply perpetuates a decades-long fight that has been ill-advised from the start, done little to solve our nation's waste problem, and wasted billions of U.S. tax payer dollars.

In the budget blueprint released by the White House, the Administration purports that its request aims "to address nuclear waste, enhance national security, and reduce future taxpayer burden," yet in practice, it will do the exact opposite. Governor Sandoval has made clear the State of Nevada will contest over 200 elements of any license application, which would likely take years to resolve and cost federal government over \$1.6 billion. Rather than attempting to force this project on our constituents, it is clear U.S. taxpayers' dollars would be better spent identifying viable alternatives for the long-term storage of nuclear waste in areas that are willing to house it.

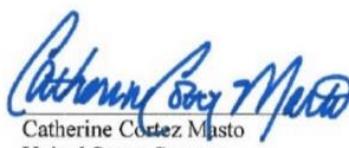
In 2005, the Department of Energy began a consent-based siting initiative to site nuclear waste storage and disposal facilities. This initiative was the result of the Blue Ribbon Commission on America's Nuclear Future, a 15 member, bipartisan group tasked with studying waste disposal. This open process ensures all Americans have a meaningful voice in the process if their community is being considered for a future nuclear waste repository. The Trump Administration should focus their efforts on that worthwhile initiative.

We stand with the State of Nevada on their staunch opposition to any attempt to restart the repository licensing process, and strongly urge you to remove the request for resources to do so from the President's budget. Concurrently, we request that the Department devote resources towards DOE's consent-based siting initiative for the storage and disposal of spent nuclear fuel and high-level radioactive waste. Thank you for your attention to this important request.

Sincerely,



Dean Heller
United States Senator



Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator

