

Energy Secretary Perry tours Yucca Mountain, meets with Governor Sandoval

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Energy Secretary Rick Perry toured Yucca Mountain and met with Nevada Gov. Brian Sandoval to discuss the project on Monday, a little more than a week after the White House included \$120 million in funding in its fiscal 2018 budget plan to restart licensing activities at the long-stalled nuclear waste dump.

Perry said in a statement that he visited the proposed nuclear repository site in Nye County on Monday morning before returning to Las Vegas to meet with Sandoval at the Nevada Supreme Court Building, where the two had a “frank and productive conversation.” Sandoval, who did not accompany Perry to Yucca, characterized their discussion similarly, though he emphasized the meeting was “not the beginning of a negotiation” on Yucca.

“I reaffirmed my unwavering opposition to any potential progress toward developing the site as a potential destination for high-level nuclear waste,” Sandoval said in a statement. “Nevada has always worked with our federal partners on issues that could affect the Silver State, but the storage of high-level waste at Yucca Mountain is not something I am willing to consider.”

Perry added that he thanked Sandoval “for the long and storied history the state of Nevada has had in our nuclear and defense industries,” while “stressing the need for Nevada to maintain its key role as we seek sensible, stable, and long term solutions” to the country’s nuclear waste disposal problem. He couched his meeting with Sandoval as “the first step” in a process that will include conversations with federal, state, local and commercial stakeholders.

“The State of Nevada has helped keep America strong, safe and secure since the earliest days of the Cold War,” Perry said. “I look forward to the State of Nevada maintaining its leadership role in America’s safety and security.”

Sandoval and five of the six members of Nevada’s congressional delegation reacted to the inclusion of Yucca-related funding in the White House’s budget proposal with vehement opposition. Republican Rep. Mark Amodei is the only member of Nevada’s congressional delegation not staunchly opposed to having a conversation about Yucca.

Democratic Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto, Republican Sen. Dean Heller and Democratic Congressman Ruben Kihuen, whose district includes Yucca, all received calls from Perry last week informing them that he would be visiting the site.

Kihuen said in a statement he was informed over the weekend of the Energy Secretary’s planned visit to Yucca, adding that it is important for Perry to “see firsthand the negative impact this project would have on Nevadans.”

“I have requested a meeting with the Secretary to discuss my concerns over installing a nuclear waste repository in Nevada’s backyard,” Kihuen said. “I hope the Nevada delegation will continue to work cooperatively and constructively to keep this project from coming back from the dead.”

Democratic Congresswoman Dina Titus said in a statement Monday that she had not been informed of Perry’s visit, though she had extended an invitation during the transition for members of the administration to visit Nevada and meet with experts on the proposed nuclear dump.

“The Trump administration has yet to acknowledge the invitation or the fact that Nevadans do not want a project that has dangerous implications for the environment, economy, and security of the region,” Titus said. “Southern Nevada is not a wasteland, and I will continue to fight to protect it from becoming a dangerous dumping ground.”

This story was updated on March 27, 2017 at 4:20 p.m. to include additional information from Energy Secretary Rick Perry about his visit, along with information from the governor’s office about his meeting with Perry. It was updated again at 6:45 p.m. to include that Perry also called Sen. Dean Heller in advance of his visit