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On the Hill, Budget Deepens Battle Lines Over Yucca

BY EXCHANGEMONITOR

Rep. John Shimkus (R-Ill.), the House of Representatives' de-facto dean of Yucca Mountain, cheered the White House's plan to resume work on that planned nuclear waste repository Wednesday, while another congressional Dean, one Sen. Dean Heller (R-Nev.), slammed the proposal as anti-Nevada.

The Trump administration's proposal to spend \$120 million on Yucca Mountain and interim nuclear waste storage in the fiscal year that starts Oct. 1 is "a key step toward fixing our nation's broken nuclear waste management policy," Shimkus said in a statement emailed to *Weapons Complex Morning Briefing*.

Shimkus has beaten the drum hard to restart the Energy Department's application to license Yucca Mountain as a repository for the the last four of his 11 terms in the House. The Illinois GOPer is the architect of draft legislation that would broadly increase the federal government's power to begin licensing the facility with the Nuclear Regulatory Commission and construct the facility in Nye County, over the objections of the Silver State.

The draft bill, the Nuclear Waste Policy Amendments Act of 2017, has not yet been scheduled for a markup in the House.

Neither, for that matter, has Trump's budget proposal, though hearings on the spending plan will begin next week, an aide for the House Appropriations Committee said Wednesday.

Meanwhile, Heller, the senior senator for Nevada now that longtime anti-Yucca crusader Harry Reid has retired, blasted the 2018 budget proposal.

"Yucca Mountain is dead," Heller wrote in a scalding statement posted to his website. "[I]t's a failed proposal that has already wasted billions of taxpayer dollars and is overwhelmingly rejected by Nevadans. It's time the

Administration move on from the Yucca debate and turn its focus to a viable solution to the country's nuclear waste problem.”

If Trump's 2018 funding proposal becomes law, however, Nevadans would quickly get a few new neighbors focused on making Yucca Mountain the solution to the country's nuclear-waste problem.

Trump's proposed DOE budget would stand up new Yucca Mountain and Interim Storage Programs, with offices in Washington, D.C., and Las Vegas. The programs would have 83 full-time employees. While the budget doesn't break down how many employees would work in which office, the Washington office would be the larger of the two with a payroll at almost \$12.5 million a year. The Vegas office's payroll would be about \$6.5 million annually.

To staff up those offices, DOE would shift over 53 employees from other Office of Nuclear Energy programs, including Used Nuclear Fuel Disposition R&D and Integrated Waste Management System, and hire 30 full-timers.

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