

Perry says no decision made on interim nuclear waste storage in Nevada

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WASHINGTON — Energy Secretary [Rick Perry](#) clarified a previous statement on interim nuclear waste storage, telling a Senate subcommittee Wednesday that no decisions have been made on temporary sites for spent fuel in Texas, New Mexico or Nevada.

Private companies in New Mexico and Texas have submitted applications to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to store nuclear waste on an interim basis.

Perry created a firestorm Tuesday when he suggested to the House Appropriations subcommittee on energy that the Nevada National Security Site could store waste temporarily.

The suggestion brought an avalanche of criticism from Nevada Gov. Brian Sandoval and members of the state's congressional delegation who called the proposal ill-conceived and likely illegal because of restrictions involving the former nuclear test site northwest of Las Vegas.

Before the Senate Appropriations subcommittee on energy, Perry clarified the statement to note that no decision has been made on interim storage and that any such plan would require coordination with Congress.

"I think it is appropriate to say, there are no plans at this particular time for interim storage in New Mexico, Nevada or Texas or any other site," Perry said.

Sandoval said he appreciated the clarification and encouraged "the secretary to pursue consent-based interim storage solutions."

The governor was contacted by the White House on Wednesday and spoke to the Department of Energy before Perry appeared before the Senate panel.

Perry was appearing before the Senate panel to defend the \$28 billion budget request for the Energy Department.

The budget includes \$110 million to restart the stalled licensing for the Yucca Mountain nuclear waste site in Nevada and \$10 million for interim storage study.

Sen. Lamar Alexander, R-Tenn., chairman of the Senate subcommittee, applauded the restart of the Yucca Mountain licensing but said additional storage will be needed to address the growing stockpile of waste at nuclear power plants nationwide.

Alexander said the quickest and probably least expensive way would be for the DOE to “contract with a private storage facility for used nuclear fuel.” He also said two private companies in New Mexico and Texas have submitted applications to store the waste.

Perry agreed with Alexander that it would be quicker to store fuel in interim storage sites.

“You are correct in the speed in which you could store it,” Perry said.

Former Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz said regional consolidated storage at interim sites was not included in the 1980’s Nuclear Waste Policy Act.

“It should always have been an integral part of a spent fuel management system,” Moniz said, speaking earlier at the National Press Club.

And Moniz said opposition in Nevada remains a hurdle for permanent storage at Yucca Mountain.

“The lack of consent-based approach seems to be the biggest obstacle to getting it going,” Moniz said of opening a permanent repository.

Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., the ranking Democrat on the subcommittee, said it was imperative to move spent fuel from states, but she questioned the safety of Yucca Mountain.

In a letter that Alexander placed in the record, [Sen. Dean Heller, R-Nev.](#), urged the committee not to appropriate funds to restart licensing at Yucca Mountain and noted the opposition in the state to open the repository.

Heller said he was also deeply troubled by Perry’s comments about the Nevada National Security Site for temporary storage.

“Not only do I believe that this comment is irresponsible, but I also remain concerned about the legality of such actions by the department,” Heller said.

Facilities or sites for temporary storage of nuclear material or waste would also need to receive a license through the NRC, a process that can take several years.

Congress designated Yucca Mountain as the nation’s permanent repository for nuclear waste in 1987. Since then, the DOE has spent \$15 billion to develop and study the site.

Perry reiterated that it is a “moral obligation” for the federal government to fulfill its obligation under the law.

“For too many years, the prior administration has literally kicked the can down the road on nuclear waste,” Perry said in testimony.

Alexander said a bipartisan Senate bill is expected to be reintroduced this year that includes Yucca Mountain, but would create a new federal agency to find additional permanent repositories and temporary facilities for used nuclear fuel.

A House bill introduced this year would streamline the restarting of the licensing application for Yucca Mountain.

Alexander said the Senate spending bill for DOE could likely include more than the \$10 million sought by the Trump administration to develop interim storage sites.

Differences in authorizing and spending bills in the two chambers would have to be reconciled by House-Senate conference committees.

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