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Yucca Mountain Revival Takes Another Step Forward

BY EXCHANGEMONITOR

The House Appropriations Committee on Wednesday approved legislation that would provide \$150 million to the Department of Energy and Nuclear Regulatory Commission for licensing of the Yucca Mountain repository for nuclear waste in Nevada.

The funding in the \$37.6 billion energy and water appropriations bill is in line with the Trump administration's intention to resume development of the Yucca Mountain facility, which was terminated under its predecessor and faces intense opposition from the Nevada state government and congressional delegation.

"The bill sends a clear message that it is time to address the long-term storage of spent nuclear fuel and finish Yucca Mountain license applications, with \$120 million going to the Department of Energy and \$30 million to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission," Rep. Mike Simpson (R-Idaho), chairman of the House Appropriations energy and water subcommittee, said during the markup for the appropriations measure.

The bill directs DOE to use appropriated funds to re-establish its capacity to respond to NRC requests during the regulator's review of the license application and for other support for the licensing process. "The recommendation includes support for affected units of local government that have formally consented to host Yucca Mountain," according to the legislation.

Under the bill, no DOE funds could be employed for closure of the Yucca Mountain facility or for any steps that would prevent the geologic repository from opening at some point.

The Department of Energy would receive \$45 million for “generic” used nuclear fuel disposition research and development operations. However, some work previously covered in this budget line item has been shifted to Yucca Mountain licensing, the bill report says.

The legislation now goes to the House for final approval. The Senate Appropriations Committee has not yet released its version of the energy and water bill, which would ultimately have to be reconciled with the House proposal.