

Nevada senators fight Yucca Mountain restart on two fronts

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WASHINGTON – Trump administration efforts to [revive the licensing process](#) for a nuclear waste repository at Nevada’s Yucca Mountain are being met with stiff resistance from Nevada’s senators.

Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto, D-Nev., sent a letter to Energy Secretary Rick Perry on Monday with questions about funding proposed in fiscal 2019 budget to restart the licensing process, which was halted in 2011 by the Obama administration.

The senator is seeking details on how the Department of Energy spent leftover, or carryover, funds when the licensing was suspended. Approximately \$42 million in carryover funds was available in 2014, but a Jan. 18 letter from the U.S. Nuclear Infrastructure Council estimated that \$10 million in carryover funding is available for licensing.

“Congress has been clear in its wishes that this licensing not proceed, and we are greatly concerned about the drawdown of these carryover funds that would be used for this purpose,” stated the letter.

The letter was sent one day before Perry is expected to appear before the Senate Energy and Natural Resources to explain his budget requests for the next fiscal year, which begins Oct. 1.

Last week. Sen. Dean Heller, R-Nev., grilled Perry and Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao on the Trump administration’s plans to ship nuclear waste by storage to Nevada and Yucca Mountain, located about 90 miles northwest of Las Vegas.

The DOE budget request seeks \$120 million to restart the licensing process. A similar budget request was made last year. Although the House increased the amount, the Senate did not act on the request.

Perry, under questioning by Heller, said he included the request in the 2019 budget.

“When I took the oath of office, I put my hand up and said I was going to follow the law and the Constitution,” Perry said.

Congress in 1987 designated Yucca Mountain as a national repository for nuclear waste produced by power plants nationwide. Failure of the federal government to build a permanent repository has created a stockpile of waste at the nation’s nuclear power plants.

Nevada has fought the designation of Yucca Mountain as the national repository, arguing that its residents should not be forced to store nuclear waste when it has no nuclear power plants and receives no nuclear-generated power.

Nye County, home of Yucca Mountain, and other rural Nevada counties have backed a licensing process to determine whether the repository would be safe. They also see an economic boon with construction and the administration of a nuclear waste facility.

Heller quizzed Chao on the safety of shipping nuclear waste across the country by rail, and whether it posed a risk to cities and states if an accident occurred.

Chao told Heller she was “aware of the sensitivity of Yucca Mountain.”

Meanwhile, the letter sent to Perry in advance of his appearance before the Senate specifically seeks answers on how much of the money allocated for licensing activities was spent on pension obligations, audits and maintenance of Yucca Mountain Project records or scientific information.

The letter asks Perry to report how much the DOE spent on licensing from 2007 to 2011, when the process was suspended. Cortez Masto also wants a DOE estimate of what licensing will cost if the process is restarted.

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