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Budgets approved to fight Yucca Mountain

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CARSON CITY — The budgets for the state agencies charged with fighting the Yucca Mountain high-level nuclear waste dump were approved Saturday by the Senate Finance and Assembly Ways and Means committees.

The budget for the Agency for Nuclear Projects totals \$3.8 million for the next two years, with most of the money going to fight against restarting Yucca Mountain. Of that total, \$1.3 million will be spent fighting the expected restart of licensing proceedings.

The attorney general's office budgets were also approved by the panels, including \$3.4 million over two years to fight the project.

The money committees approved the funding without comment. The funding will now become part of the budget bills lawmakers will approve later this month as part of Sandoval's \$8.2 billion, 2017-19 general fund budget.

Sandoval, Nevada Attorney General Adam Laxalt and most state lawmakers strongly oppose any restart of the Yucca Mountain licensing hearings. A resolution stating the Legislature's opposition will get a committee hearing Monday.

But some Nevada elected officials, including Nye County Commissioner Dan Schinhofen, argue the licensing proceedings should be allowed to go forward to determine decisively whether Yucca Mountain is a suitable site for the dump. Attorneys for Nevada have raised scores of issues challenging the site's suitability.

Despite past claims that the project has been long dead, President Donald Trump's budget blueprint, issued in March, included \$120 million in new funds to the Energy Department and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to restart Yucca Mountain licensing activities.

The omnibus funding bill Congress approved this past week did not include any Yucca Mountain funding. But the funding could be included in the federal fiscal year 2018 budget, which begins Oct. 1.

The House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on the Environment held a hearing on Yucca on April 26 and is expected to draft legislation for licensing proceedings to commence.

The Agency for Nuclear Projects indicated that the first step in the process is expected to be the reconstituting of the Yucca Mountain Construction Authorization Boards, followed by a case management conference. The restart proceedings could take up to a year, with hearings on challenges to the licensing application lasting three or more years.

Nevada officials estimate that a licensing hearing would require more than 400 days, taking an estimated four to five years at a cost to the Energy Department \$1.66 billion.

Yucca Mountain is in Nye County, about 100 miles northwest of Las Vegas.

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Storing nuclear waste

- The 1982 Nuclear Waste Policy Act called for the federal government to provide a permanent repository for nuclear waste generated by nonmilitary reactors nationwide.
- Designated by Congress as the site for storage, Yucca Mountain was designed to hold commercial nuclear waste deep underground for 1 million years.
- The Yucca Mountain storage facility was defunded in 2012 by President Barack Obama.

– About 77,000 tons of nuclear waste are being temporarily stored at various facilities.