

Nevada Appeal

Congress could fund Yucca restart next year

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The head of Nevada's Nuclear Projects Office said Thursday he doesn't expect Congress to approve funding to re-start licensing of Yucca Mountain this year.

But Bob Halstead told the Commission on Nuclear Projects after the first of the year, there's a 90 percent chance of funding to move forward with licensing the nuclear waste dump north of Las Vegas.

Nevada has been battling to prevent Yucca Mountain from being opened to store high-level nuclear waste for some 30 years and, under the Obama administration, the project was basically cut off and stripped of further funding.

"Since the 2016 elections, there has been a 180 degree turn in the Department of Energy approach," he said.

The Obama administration's decision to end Yucca Mountain, he said, was reversed by Energy Secretary Rick Perry.

The House of Representatives has already approved a bill funding Yucca Mountain. Halstead said it includes \$220 million for the Energy Department – which he pointed out is \$100 million more than President Trump requested when he called for licensing of the dump. In addition, that budget includes \$47 million for the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to fund the licensing process.

Halstead said, however, the Senate is taking a softer approach set to follow the Blue Ribbon Commission recommendations from 2006 that advocate for an "Informed Consent Act" that would require agreement from the governor, the affected county, host tribes and adjacent counties before a nuclear dump could be built.

Halstead said he's also concerned about the proposal to increase the capacity of Yucca Mountain from 70 metric tons of waste to 110 metric tons because of the impact not only on the thermal loading underground at the site but the increased number of trucks, trains and other forms of transport moving the waste across country to Nevada.

"This issue alone should be enough to get people thinking seriously about the dangers," said Commissioner Michon Mackedon.

But Commissioner Lois Tarkanian said she doubts anybody outside of Nevada cares.

Chairman Richard Bryan and other commissioners said Nevada has to do a much better job of getting the word out particularly about the dangers of transporting the waste not just from accidents but potential terrorist attacks on the waste containers – including through social media.

The commission will meet at least twice more this year to prepare its biennial report to the Legislature and governor on how the state should move forward in the fight to block Yucca Mountain.