

**Opening Statement of the Honorable Fred Upton
Subcommittee on Environment and the Economy
“Update on Low-Level Radioactive Waste Disposal Issues”
October 28, 2015**

(As Prepared for Delivery)

Nuclear technology is deployed throughout our economy in a variety of different ways. For example, radioactive monitors accurately map subsurface geology to assist the United States’ efforts to capitalize on the oil and gas renaissance. Nuclear medicine provides medical treatments that save thousands of lives. And this technology will only grow and advance with the research and innovation that the 21st Century Cures Act will spawn.

However, all of these activities generate low-level radioactive waste, which must be properly managed, transported, and disposed. Congress provided this responsibility to the states, which were to form interstate compacts to collaborate to site a disposal facility. However, not all states joined compacts, including my home state of Michigan.

There is currently only one available disposal site, located in Texas, for non-compact states. I am pleased to welcome the Texas Low Level Radioactive Waste Disposal Compact Commission this morning to understand how the Compact is operating and to learn how they intend to dispose of the nation’s low-level waste.

In the years since Congress passed the Low-Level Radioactive Waste Policy Act of 1980, we have struggled to develop the system that Congress envisioned. Today, Canada, our neighbor in the Great Lakes region, is facing a similar challenge. Our experience addressing permanent disposal of nuclear material may offer some lessons learned for Canada.

I’m hopeful that today’s hearing will serve to inform this committee about ongoing challenges and opportunities in managing nuclear waste.

I also would like to briefly comment on the markup that we’ll have immediately following this hearing. At last week’s hearing members discussed moving S. 611 without amendment so that we can put it on a fast track to enactment. By unanimously passing S. 611, the Senate has given us a rare opportunity. We can do our part to help this reauthorization become law if we can all agree to approve the bill exactly as it passed the Senate so that, if the House passes it, it will go directly to the president for his signature.

Many smaller and rural communities across the United States, including many in my home state of Michigan, face significant challenges in replacing, maintaining, and upgrading their aging water infrastructure. It’s also clear that many of our constituents responsible for managing small rural drinking water systems support S. 611 too.

Many of us have discussed various ideas to improve the Safe Drinking Water Act, from addressing the State Revolving Fund, to developing statutory flexibility for small systems to meet the growing technical challenges of complying with changing drinking water standards. The bill before us today would help communities in Southwest Michigan and across the country manage increased costs and the burden of meeting complex regulatory requirements under the Safe Water Drinking Act.

We want to make law in this area. Our best chance to do that is to take up the Senate-passed bill and pass it on to the president’s desk where it will become law with no hitches, and all of our small and rural communities will be better for it. I urge all Members to vote yes to approve S. 611 and to oppose any amendments.

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