

Testimony of Congresswoman Jacky Rosen (NV-03)
House Committee on Energy and Commerce
Subcommittee on Environment
Hearing Entitled: “H.R. ____, the Nuclear Waste Policy Amendments Act of 2017”
April 26, 2017

Major points:

- The majority of Nevadans reject the Yucca Mountain nuclear waste repository plan because it poses a threat to the health and safety of Nevadans and tourists.
- Numerous scientific studies have deemed the site unsafe for nuclear waste disposal based on the fact that Yucca Mountain is seismically active and sits above an aquifer.
- Severe accidents from transporting the nuclear waste threaten the health and safety of tourists and individuals who live along proposed routes, and would cause hundreds of millions of dollars in cleanup costs and related economic losses.
- This bill unfortunately eliminates the current requirement for progress on a second repository - placing the entire burden on Nevada.
- The Nuclear Waste Policy Act allows the EPA and NRC to change environmental protection standards and technical requirements before final licensing.
- Any plan addressing nuclear waste storage must follow a “consent based” process.

Text:

Chairman Shimkus, Ranking Member Tonko, members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify at today’s hearing. I am here today to make one thing clear: that Nevadans wholeheartedly oppose becoming the nation’s dumping ground for nuclear waste.

In 1987, Congress amended the Nuclear Waste Policy Act and targeted Yucca Mountain, located less than 100 miles northwest of Las Vegas, as the sole site for our nation’s geological repository. For over 30 years, the state of Nevada and local communities have rejected this project on safety, public health, and environmental grounds. In fact, the state has filed 218 contentions against the Department of Energy’s (DOE) license application, challenging the adequacy of DOE’s environmental impact assessments.

Numerous scientific studies have deemed Yucca Mountain unsafe based on the fact that the site is seismically active and sits above an aquifer. The repository may not be able to prevent radioactive contamination of groundwater for one million years - the limit adopted by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Using Yucca Mountain as the nation’s dumping ground would require transporting over 70,000 metric tons of radioactive waste, much of it through my district, and through the heart of Las Vegas, a city that attracts over 43 million visitors annually and generates 59 billion dollars in revenue according to the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority.

Severe transportation accidents threaten the health and safety of tourists and individuals who live along the proposed waste transportation routes, and would cause hundreds of millions of dollars in cleanup costs and related economic losses.

We're talking about shipping a total of 9,495 rail casks, which is equivalent to 2,800 trains, or 2,650 truck casks over 50 years. That translates to roughly 1-3 trains or 1-2 truck shipments every day on our Nevada highways over 50 years from 76 shipping sites across the country, through the I-15 corridor, known to be one of the most dangerous highway systems in the country, according to the Nevada AAA.

Do you truly believe that shipping over 2,600 truck casks of high-level nuclear waste over a span of 50 years won't result in at least one radiological release?

In the event of a radiological release, it is said to be nearly impossible to determine the range of exposure, let alone all of the long-term health effects for those facing exposure. Cancer, genetic defects, and asthma have all been linked to radiation.

It is my understanding that any legislation must include and implement the National Academy of Sciences' safety and security recommendations, such as shipping older fuel first and full-scale testing of the casks. This bill ignores to fulfill such requirements.

This bill proposes a radical change in the nation's approach to nuclear waste management. The Nuclear Waste Policy Act calls for two repositories to ensure regional equity and address technical redundancy. This bill does away with that by eliminating the current requirement for progress on a second repository - placing the entire burden on Nevada.

I also oppose Section 601(a) and (b) of the bill because they allow the EPA and NRC to change the rules in the middle of the game. Section 601(a) would allow the EPA to change environmental protection standards before NRC final licensing - essentially inviting the EPA to gut the groundwater protection standards. Section 601(b) would allow the NRC to change the repository technical requirements and criteria - essentially inviting the NRC to gut their technical requirements.

Any plan addressing nuclear waste storage must be based on scientific analysis as well as trust and agreement among affected parties. In 2012, the Blue Ribbon Commission on America's Nuclear Future issued its final report on nuclear waste storage, recommending a "consent based" process for choosing a site. I am proud to be an original co-sponsor of the Nuclear Waste Informed Consent Act, a bill supported by the entire Southern Nevada Delegation that would prohibit the dumping of nuclear waste in a state without its consent.

This bill ignores the environmental, safety, and security concerns of Nevadans who would be forced to store nuclear waste that they had no role in creating. I urge this Subcommittee to stop wasting billions of taxpayer dollars by harping on Yucca Mountain, and instead identify viable alternatives for the long-term repository in areas that are proven safe and consent to siting.