

House Oversight Committee – Field Hearing

Written Opening Statement by Congressman Darrell Issa

7 June 2019

Good morning, Chairman Rouda and Ranking Member Comer. Thank you for holding this field hearing today on nuclear waste management and storage solutions. I am pleased to be here with you to discuss such an important topic.

For the 18 years I served in Congress, my district encompassed the San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station, also known as SONGS.

SONGS is positioned near an active earthquake fault line, sits alongside a hectic train rail line, sandwiched between the heavily trafficked I-5 freeway and the Pacific Ocean, and borders the densely-populated Counties of Orange and San Diego.

For 45 years, SONGS provided reliable, clean energy for 1.4 million people in Southern California until its closure in 2013.

With a nuclear plant decommissioning in my backyard – and the unfortunate incident in 2011 at the Fukushima Daiichi, Japan, plant serving as a reminder of potential destruction – for me, my constituents, and the 8 million other people living within 50 miles of SONGS, what do we now do with the spent nuclear fuel?

Through the appropriations process and legislation, I worked with both Chambers and both parties to reach bipartisan support to back interim storage linked to a permanent repository.

In the 114th Congress, I worked with Chairman Conaway on H.R. 3643, *the Interim Consolidated Storage Act of 2015*, which would have allowed the Nuclear Regulatory Commission and the Department of Energy (DOE) to enter into interim consolidated storage contracts.

It prioritized the removal of waste from decommissioned sites, and it would have helped the federal government fulfil its long overdue obligation to remove spent nuclear fuel from commercial nuclear power plants and to transport it to a geological repository, opposed to waiting another 30 years for Yucca Mountain.

We need Yucca as a permanent repository. But, a consolidated interim storage facility is a timelier, and equally responsible and safe, solution. However, I think we still need to presume and act as if we know interim still means a very, long time.

Notably, interim storage could also save billions of taxpayer dollars since it costs almost as much to monitor nuclear waste at a single reactor site as it would be to monitor all the waste in the country located at one repository.

The following Congress, I reintroduced the bill (H.R. 474) and again, we received increasing support from constituents and local governments and leaders, including neighboring cities, the Orange County Board of Supervisors, the San Diego County Board of Supervisors, the San Diego Regional Chamber, the Concerned Coastal Communities Coalition, and even the Sierra Club Angeles Chapter.

This bill was not a comprehensive approach to our country's nuclear waste storage issue, but it proposed *a reasonable, and feasible option to quickly* get the responsibility of the federal government rolling on this massive issue that impacts dozens of communities across the nation.

Last Congress, the House overwhelmingly supported the “interim + Yucca” approach with a 340-72 vote on Chairman Shimkus’s bill, H.R. 3053, *the Nuclear Waste Policy Amendments Act*.

This bill was an important step forward in resolving the pending Yucca Mountain license, developing interim storage options and moving nuclear waste out of local communities, and protecting ratepayers from the broken DOE financing mechanism.

This year, Senator Barrasso has released a discussion draft which mirrors the House-passed bill. And Congressmen McNerney and Shimkus have reintroduced *the Nuclear Waste Policy Amendments Act*, adding the specific prioritization of transferring spent fuel from decommissioned sites in seismically active areas – such as SONGS.

Congressman Mike Levin’s bill would similarly prioritize sites like SONGS for both permanent and interim storage.

Clearly there is bipartisan consensus that there are safer places to store spent fuel rods than at SONGS. The question is – will Congress act appropriately to find storage in an interim option with the end goal still being permanent storage?