

Testimony of
Congressman Crescent Hardy (NV-04)
Thursday, July 7, 2016, at 10:00 a.m.
Before the Subcommittee on Environment and the Economy
Hearing titled:

“Federal, State, and Local Agreements and Economic Benefits for Spent Nuclear Fuel Disposal”

Chairman Shimkus, Ranking Member Tonko, Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you at today’s hearing.

I represent Nevada’s 4th Congressional District, which stretches from North Las Vegas and northern Clark County into all or part of 6 rural counties in Central Nevada.

Now, there are many folks back here in Washington who might not be aware that anything exists in Nevada north of a small strip of Las Vegas Boulevard. As far as they are concerned, it’s just empty desert.

However, such thinking fails to recognize the diverse mosaic of people who represent the backbone of Nevada, including the hard-working families of North Las Vegas, the rich cultural heritage of our indigenous tribes, and the miners and ranchers who symbolize the industrious spirit of the American West.

It also ignores the incredible contributions and burdens borne by this part of Nevada to protect our national security, generation after generation.

From the testing and development of our nuclear deterrent that allowed the United States to win the Cold War, to the most advanced and realistic air combat training anywhere in the world, to the dedicated Airmen and women who fly remotely piloted aircraft in the war against ISIS and al Qaeda; people in this part of Nevada are no strangers to serving our country.

They are also no pushovers, nor am I.

As their Representative, I am committed to fight so all of their voices are heard, and to ensure that they always have a seat at the table.

That brings us to the reason why I am seated at this table here today.

Yucca Mountain, located roughly 100 miles northwest of Las Vegas, has been designated by an Act of Congress as the only authorized site for a permanent repository to house spent nuclear fuel and highly radioactive waste.

In the nearly 30 years since that decision, billions of taxpayers’ dollars have been spent, endless litigation has played out, Administrations have stonewalled, recriminations have abounded.

Yet two fundamental problems have continued to fester:

Number One - Our nation has tens of thousands of metric tons of high-level radioactive waste and spent nuclear fuel dangerously piling up at power plants across the country, with nowhere to safely put it.

And Number Two - Many Nevadans feel that they are being forced by the federal government to store dangerous material that they had no role in creating.

Both of these facts are shameful failures of the federal government, and both need to be addressed now.

I often reflect on the courage of our Founders and the many great American leaders who followed them to take on the tough issues and make difficult decisions.

And on the heels of Monday's celebration of our nation's 240th year of independence, I am reminded of the responsibility elected officials have to the American people now more than ever.

The issue of nuclear storage is not about any one politician's legacy. It can't be. Because on this issue, we are talking not just about millennia, but millions of years into the future.

Geologic time doesn't care about partisan politics and egos.

Long after we're all forgotten, footnotes in the dusty pages of history, the decisions we make here won't be. The decisions we make here will live on and impact the lives of countless generations.

That is why the decisions we make here in Washington, or Carson City, or Tonopah, or anywhere else for that matter, need to be based on the soundest of science and the best interests of Nevadans and every single American.

The beauty of science is that it is a great equalizer. Whether you're in Nevada, Illinois, or on the surface of the moon, the laws of science are universal, regardless of politics.

Yucca Mountain needs to stop being an issue that Administrations here in Washington only find useful every four years in the state of Nevada.

Nevadans deserve to have honest brokers in their federal government, and they deserve to hear the unbiased, scientific results that all of their hard-earned dollars funded.

After being privileged enough to be elected to represent Nevada's 4th District in Congress, I discovered that too many politicians are afraid to engage in a constructive dialogue on this issue. They fail to recognize that discussing Yucca Mountain doesn't equal endorsement of the project.

Dialogue isn't capitulation. It's leadership.

I will never support a repository in Nevada that isn't safe and that the people don't want. Period.

Nevadans deserve a seat at the table, and I've taken one of those seats.

I appreciate the Committee's willingness to hear my testimony today, and I look forward to working with Members on both sides of the aisle to work toward a solution that is worthy of the Americans who have sent us here.