

Congressman Joe Wilson
House Committee on Energy and Commerce, Subcommittee on Environment
April 26, 2017

Chairman John Shimkus, Ranking Member Paul Tonko, thank you for having me here today. I am grateful to have the opportunity to testify before Energy and Commerce Committee's Subcommittee on Environment.

In January, I introduced the *Sensible Nuclear Waste Disposition Act* and appreciate that it has been included in *the Nuclear Waste Policy Amendment Act of 2017*. The *Sensible Nuclear Waste Disposition Act* is common-sense legislation that simply requires that the Nuclear Regulatory Commission make a licensing decision, one way or the other, about Yucca Mountain before the Department of Energy can consider other options for long-term waste.

I appreciate the concerns of Nevada, while I hope we recognize a national perspective when it comes to managing and storing nuclear waste. Today, there are currently 121 communities across 39 states that are grappling with the limitations of storing nuclear waste while our country lacks a permanent geological repository. Communities in my home state of South Carolina, in the Chairman's state of Illinois, the Ranking Member's state of New York—in the home states of the majority of members of the committee all store nuclear material. Each of the 121 communities has been forced to store nuclear waste while they wait for the federal government to honor its promise by providing interim storage at Yucca Mountain.

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While the nuclear material is currently being safely stored across the country, we are in desperate need of a long-term, viable solution. Having a single, permanent repository for high-level nuclear waste is critical for our national security. Right now, in the absence of a permanent repository, nuclear material is stored all over the country—making it difficult and costly to secure. Having a single location, 1,000 feet underground, is far more effective and secure for the environment with one location instead of 121 across the nation.

Additionally, completing the licensing process for Yucca Mountain is fiscally responsible. The federal government has dedicated enormous resources to completing the nuclear storage facility at Yucca Mountain. American taxpayers have invested over \$3.7 billion into Yucca Mountain. Additionally, energy utility ratepayers from across the country have contributed over \$30 billion to the Nuclear Waste Fund which can only be used towards the construction and operation of Yucca Mountain, with citizens from South Carolina, Illinois, New York, and more each having over \$1 billion invested. Starting over with another project would cost billions from taxpayers and ratepayers alike, and would take decades to complete—leaving 121 sites across the country as de facto dumping grounds for nuclear waste.

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In 2010, the previous Administration halted the licensing process for Yucca Mountain for political reasons. We should not allow political reasons to continue to impede progress. Rather, we should allow the facts to speak for themselves, like the fact that officials in Nye County, Nevada, where Yucca Mountain is located, support the repository. Countless, non-partisan, fact-based studies have determined that the underground geological repository of Yucca Mountain far exceeds the highest safety ratings.

I am confident that the rigorous, fact-based, non-partisan examination by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission will result in a favorable result for Yucca Mountain's license. I am equally confident that the thoroughness of the process will allay the technical and scientific concerns of my colleagues from Nevada. I urge the Committee to pass *the Nuclear Waste Policy Amendments Act of 2017*, to ensure we see the licensing process on Yucca Mountain to completion before abandoning it for any other alternative. The federal government should finish what they started—or, at the very least—should make an official decision on Yucca before spending billions of dollars on a duplicative facility.

In addition to making progress on a permanent repository, *the Nuclear Waste Policy Amendments Act* should consider amending the way we classify

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nuclear material by updating our standard to classify waste by composition rather than point of origin. This would expand the Department of Energy's ability to designate waste that was previously only eligible for Yucca Mountain to other disposition sites. While that doesn't eliminate the urgency of completing Yucca Mountain, it does expedite the environmental cleanup mission at dozens of defense nuclear facilities across the country. I am grateful that my constituent, Aiken County Council Member Chuck Smith testified in support of the reclassification of nuclear waste before the subcommittee in 2015.

We have a duty to work towards a permanent repository for nuclear waste. The *Nuclear Waste Policy Amendments Act* does an excellent job of strengthening the *Nuclear Waste Policy Act* and advancing our shared goals of protecting national security and promoting our national environmental clean-up mission.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify before you today, and thank you for your time and attention.