

Nevada can't be bribed to take waste at Yucca Mountain, Titus says

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Dangling money or other assets in front of Nevada to let the federal government bury the nation's most potent nuclear waste in Yucca Mountain is not an option, Rep. Dina Titus said Wednesday during a hearing on the issue.

The Nevada Democrat said she understood the purpose of the House Energy and Commerce subcommittee hearing in Washington was "to suggest some benefit will accrue to Nevada for hosting nuclear waste generated elsewhere."

"Well, on behalf of the three out of four Nevadans who oppose Yucca Mountain, I am here to say, we cannot and will not be bought off," she said.

Titus added that project backers have made "false promises," claiming that Nevada "will receive hundreds of millions of dollars for infrastructure projects or be allocated more water from the Colorado River."

"There is not even money for the completion of the Yucca Mountain project, much less extra bribe funding for Nevada," Titus said.

The merits and drawbacks of the Yucca Mountain Project were aired anew, this time in a hearing that some congressmen suggested should have been used to discuss safe drinking water.

Rep. Frank Pallone, D-N.J., said the hearing on the government's stalled plans to entomb 77,000 tons of spent reactor fuel in the mountain, 100 miles northwest of Las Vegas, "misses the mark."

"Unfortunately, instead of looking for a new path forward, all we're doing is pursuing the same old path down the same old rabbit hole," he said.

Nevertheless, the subcommittee spent 1 hour and 40 minutes talking primarily about benefits Nevada could reap from land transfers, water acquisition, reprocessing nuclear waste and transporting it to the mountain if only Nevada wants to be a willing host.

It doesn't.

In his opening remarks, Rep. John Shimkus, R-Ill., chairman of the subcommittee on Environment and the Economy, noted that Gov. Brian Sandoval had declined to testify because his position remains unchanged: He opposes the Yucca Mountain project for scientific, technical and legal reasons.

Shimkus said he understands the governor's position and looks forward to seeing the scientific and technical issues resolved if the Nuclear Regulatory Commission resumes the licensing process.

"Governor Sandoval is rightly proud of Nevada's contributions to our nation as a host of key national security facilities and armed forces bases," Shimkus said. "He notes, and I quote, 'Nevadans also believe our relationship with the federal government should be one where the state is seen as a valued partner, an ideal that is often not recognized.'"

To have a two-way conversation, Shimkus said Congress “needs to assure financial resources for the state ... when the money is needed.”

Rep. Crescent Hardy, R-Nev., said he would “never support a repository in Nevada that isn’t safe and the people don’t want.”

Rep. Mark Amodei, R-Nev., said he doesn’t believe Yucca Mountain “should become a single dumping site for the nation’s nuclear waste.”

However, Amodei noted the project is not off the table.

“Nevadans should use this as an opportunity to dictate the terms of the repository under the best conditions for our state,” Amodei said.

Local officials invited to testify included Nye County Commissioner Dan Schinhofen, who said, “Is it going to be safe? ... I think if the science is proven and done by the NRC in a fair and open process, people would definitely be more responsive.

“What needs to happen more than anything, we need to follow the law and let the process play itself out. And then we will know,” Schinhofen said.

His comments came in response to questions by Rep. Jerry McNerney, D-Calif., about whether Nevadans would accept disposing nuclear waste in Yucca Mountain if there is consent and the federal government meets state and local demands through a transparent, scientific process.

Regardless of the science, McNerney said given the contamination problems with nuclear testing in Nevada and nuclear waste in Rocky Flats, Colorado; Savannah River, South Carolina; and Hanford, Washington, there are “very expensive, very dangerous nuclear waste sites that need to be cleaned up because of actions of the federal government.”

“Now the federal government is trying to force Nevada (into) using Yucca Mountain without proper transparency, without consent, and now the result is we’ve got a big stalemate, 20 years, 30 years (and) nothing has happened,” he said.

“If the citizens of Nevada say, ‘no,’ then is any other community in the country going to say, ‘yes?’” McNerney asked. “We need transparency. We need science. I’m just worried that even if we do those things that mistrust is so deep that we’re not going to be able to convince any community to accept nuclear waste.”

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