

YUCCA MOUNTAIN

House passes bill to amend Nuclear Waste Policy Act

An overwhelming vote in favor of H.R. 3053 to proceed with work on a repository at Yucca Mountain in Nevada doesn't guarantee that the Senate will be so supportive.

By a vote of 340–72, the U.S. House of Representatives on May 10 passed a bill intended to jump-start the Yucca Mountain licensing process. Introduced last year by Rep. John Shimkus (R., Ill.), the Nuclear Waste Policy Amendments Act (H.R. 3053) preserves Yucca Mountain as the most expeditious path for the disposal of spent nuclear fuel and high-level radioactive waste, while also authorizing consolidated interim storage until the Nevada repository is licensed and ready to receive spent fuel shipments.

The House also voted by almost equal measure to deny an amendment by Rep. Dina Titus (D., Nev.) to require consensus-based siting for permanent nuclear repos-

itories. Because of the lack of state, tribal, and regional support for Yucca Mountain in Nevada, the amendment would have essentially killed the Shimkus bill. Additional amendments to the bill proposed by Nevada lawmakers were denied by the House Rules Committee.

According to the bill summary, H.R. 3053 addresses federal land withdrawal and related management issues, updates the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's licensing process and conditions for the repository, and limits actions related to the development of a separate repository for spent fuel and HLW derived from Department of Energy defense activities. The bill also revises the method by which the DOE funds its nuclear waste management activities through the Nuclear Waste Fund.

In a joint statement with House Energy and Commerce Committee Chairman Greg Walden (R., Ore.), Shimkus said, "It's long past time for the federal government to keep its 35-year-old promise to taxpayers, ratepayers, and communities across the country to permanently dispose of spent nuclear fuel and defense waste. The Nuclear Waste Policy Amendments Act is a common sense step in that direction, and we commend today's bipartisan vote in the House. We urge the Senate to quickly take up and pass this legislation to address this national priority." The bill was passed by the House Energy and Commerce Committee last year on a 49–4 vote (NN, Aug. 2017, p. 28).

The bill, however, faces opposition in the closely divided Senate. Following the House vote, Sen. Dean Heller (R., Nev.) and Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto (D., Nev.) both said that the bill would be "dead on arrival" in the Senate. "Not only will I place a hold on the bill immediately," Heller said, "I will object to the motion to proceed and [will] stop this proposal at every procedural turn." **NN**



H.R. 3053 addresses a number of issues related to a repository at Yucca Mountain, including federal land withdrawal, the NRC's licensing process, and the DOE's funding of waste management activities.