

Rep. Dina Titus critical of congressional effort to push Yucca Mountain project forward

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CARSON CITY — It is a riddle for the ages: What is dead but never dies? The answer in Nevada is the proposed nuclear waste dump at Yucca Mountain.

As a state legislative panel overseeing the moribund Yucca Mountain high-level nuclear waste repository gets ready to meet later this week, Rep. Dina Titus has criticized a new effort in Congress to move the project forward.

In a news release last week, Titus, D-Nev., spoke out about a plan to fund the project in the Fiscal 2017 Energy-Water Appropriations bill, HR 5055.

The provision would allot the U.S. Department of Energy \$150 million to continue an application process to license the project as a nuclear storage facility. The legislation also prohibits any funds from being used to close Yucca Mountain as a future storage option.

Titus noted that congressional supporters of Yucca Mountain made the same attempt last year but failed to see it become law.

Titus has sponsored the Nuclear Waste Informed Consent Act, which would require projects such as Yucca Mountain to receive approval from local governments in affected areas.

“Yucca Mountain is not a secure depository that would seal dangerous waste safely for a million years,” Titus said.

“It is instead a proposal based on bad science and faulty assumptions. Specifically, the NRC confirmed that it is not secure, that it will leak, and that radiation will travel miles through underground water sources to farming communities in the Amargosa Valley on its way to Death Valley National Park.”

The waste will also have to be transported across the U.S. to the site, 100 miles northwest of Las Vegas. The Obama administration in 2010 shelved the controversial project, which faced opposition from many Nevada political leaders and citizens, but efforts to revive it continue.

U.S. Sen. Dean Heller, R-Nev., sent a letter to the House Appropriations subcommittee members on April 12 asking that the provision, and another \$20 million for the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to advance the Yucca Mountain license application, be removed from the legislation.

“I would urge the subcommittee to prioritize funding for the Department of Energy’s efforts to advance alternative long-term storage options for our nation’s spent nuclear fuel and high-level radioactive waste,” he said.

“While I understand that many of my colleagues disagree with me on the issue of Yucca Mountain, Nevadans have a right to be safe in their own backyards.”

Nevada’s Committee on High-Level Radioactive Waste will meet for the first time this year on Friday to get an overview of the status of the project from various officials, including Bob Halstead, executive director of the state Agency for Nuclear Projects.

While some house members may want to move the project forward, the Senate version of an appropriations bill contains no such funding.

Sen. Harry Reid of Nevada has repeatedly said the project is dead.

But presumptive GOP presidential nominee Donald Trump has not made it clear where he stands on the issue.

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