



Shimkus, House proponents call for passage of Yucca bill

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Rep. John Shimkus led a bipartisan group of speakers on the House floor Monday evening who made a case for passing the Illinois Republican's bill to restart the nuclear waste repository at Yucca Mountain.

Shimkus discussed the broader issue of the need for Congress to address nuclear waste, which is being kept in 129 locations in 39 states, while nine other speakers talked about the waste management and storage problems in their respective states.

"This issue has national support," Shimkus said noting that members from Oregon, Tennessee, Minnesota, Texas, California, Georgia and Connecticut spoke in favor of his bill.

The Illinois lawmaker availed himself of the House practice to allow members, or groups of members, to discuss any issue after legislative business is done for the day, known as special order speeches.

Shimkus, who said he has been to Las Vegas, Reno and Pahrump, held up a pin given to him by Nye County officials that said "Home of Yucca Mountain," to make the point that there is support for the project in the state. Nye County Commissioner Dan Schinhofen, in particular, has been an outspoken supporter.

"I think my [Nevada] colleagues, with all due respect, some of them are very emotional, and I don't think that's a true depiction of the state of Nevada," Shimkus told *The Nevada Independent* after the speech. "Don't get me wrong, I believe some people are in opposition... they make it sound like it's 99 percent. I don't think that's accurate."

Shimkus, who came to Reno in October to talk about project prospects, said he believes the bill would win 300 votes in the House and pass easily. However, he could not give a time frame for when it would get a vote.

One issue involves members of the Appropriations Committee, who are resisting the bill because it would dole out funding automatically rather than allowing the spending panel to provide the funding in the annual federal budget.

Of the nine other speakers, three were Democrats: Reps. Salud Carbajal and Jerry McNerney, both of California, and Rep. Joe Courtney of Connecticut.

Before Shimkus and his fellow speakers took the floor, Reps.

Dina Titus and Ruben Kihuen spoke briefly and argued that there is a risk of water contamination, according to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), as well as the risk of shipping nuclear waste over the nation's road and rail systems.

"There are design flaws that NRC's own analysis shows will lead to radioactive waste leaking into the water table and transportation plans would ship more than 70,000 metric tons of nuclear waste by train and truck through 329 Congressional Districts for years to come, passed your homes, your businesses, your schools and your churches," Titus said.

Kihuen, whose congressional district includes Yucca Mountain, questioned the rationale behind storing nuclear waste in a state that has no nuclear power plants.

"They want to make Nevada's 4th Congressional District, my home, my district, the dumping ground for the rest of the country's nuclear waste," Kihuen, adding, "It is exceedingly unfair."

In January, Titus, along with Kihuen and Rep. Jacky Rosen, sent Shimkus a document prepared by Robert Halstead, Nevada Agency for Nuclear Projects, which, among other things, was critical of the bill's provision to raise the amount of nuclear waste that could be stored in the repository to 110,000 tons from 70,000 metric tons. A metric ton is equal to just over 2,200 pounds.

"If this change is permitted, it indicates that Congress could further revise upward or completely eliminate the capacity limit at any time," the document said.

The document also said Shimkus's bill would eliminate a requirement from the original legislation, establishing the Yucca plan, for a second repository, which "would be a major change in policy."

Shimkus's bill passed the House Energy and Commerce Committee last year, with a strong bipartisan 49-to-4 vote. He has since been seeking to win support for the measure.

"Mr. Shimkus has been using this opportunity to educate members on the bill and the issue, largely those outside of our committee who have dealt with this," Haverly said.

Prior to the committee vote, members of the Nevada delegation testified against Shimkus's bill before the panel.

President Trump has signaled support for the Yucca Mountain project. He included \$120 million for Yucca in his fiscal 2019 and 2018 budget plan.

If passed by the House at some point, the bill would not likely pass the Senate with Sen. Dean Heller having pledged to use all procedural mechanisms under Senate rules to stop the project.

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