

Reid's exit will make fighting Yucca Mountain project tougher, ex-governor says

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CARSON CITY — Former Nevada Gov. Richard Bryan told a legislative panel on Friday that although the state's case against Yucca Mountain is strong, keeping the high-level nuclear waste repository at bay will be a challenge with U.S. Sen. Harry Reid's departure.

Bryan, chairman of the Nevada Commission on Nuclear Projects, said Reid, D-Nev., has succeeded in keeping the high-level nuclear waste dump from getting the funding needed to push it forward during his Senate career, which is ending.

Bryan, who helped initiate Nevada's opposition to the dump in 1983 while governor, noted that the original plan was to have the repository open in 1998.

"I believe Nevada's case is stronger today than it has ever been," Bryan told the Legislature's Committee on High Level Nuclear Waste.

But efforts continue in Congress to proceed with the project, he said.

"Suffice it to say, it is going to be a challenge," Bryan said.

There is a new effort in Congress this year to provide funding to proceed on Yucca Mountain. The Fiscal 2017 Energy-Water Appropriations bill, HR 5055, would allot the U.S. Department of Energy \$170 million to continue an application process to license the project as a nuclear storage facility. A similar effort last year failed largely because of Reid's efforts.

There is no Yucca funding in this year's Senate budget bills.

Members of Nevada's congressional delegation have criticized the latest funding effort.

The Obama administration in 2010 shelved the controversial Yucca Mountain project, which many Nevada political leaders and citizens had opposed, but efforts to revive it never seem to end.

Nye County Commissioner Dan Schinhofen also testified at the meeting. He said he was not advocating for Yucca Mountain, but was asking to let the review process proceed.

"Let's hear the science," he said. "Let the 219 contentions by the state to be heard. We welcome them to be heard. People deserve to hear the science."

Nevada's objections to the project involve everything from the technology proposed to store the waste to transportation concerns.

Bob Halstead, executive director of the state Agency for Nuclear Projects, said the state would likely need \$8 million to \$10 million a year in funding if full licensing proceedings by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission resume.

The agency continues to receive funding to maintain its efforts to participate in the limited licensing process now in progress.

Gov. Brian Sandoval remains opposed to Yucca Mountain.

Bryan said he supports “consent-based” siting of the project, and legislation called the Nuclear Waste Informed Consent Act, which would require projects such as Yucca Mountain to receive approval from local governments in affected areas, is being sponsored by members of Nevada’s congressional delegation.

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