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Can \$46 billion buy a permanent home for nuclear waste stored at San Onofre, other sites?

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Congress members shifted on the dais during a meeting this week in Washington, D.C. on the long-term possibility of creating a national spot to store nuclear waste.

“To put it bluntly,” said Anthony O’Donnell, chair of the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners, “the state and local governments have the federal government’s waste, and the federal government has our money.”

O’Donnell joined David Victor, chair of San Onofre’s Community Engagement Panel, and other experts in chiding a [U.S. House Oversight and Government Reform subcommittee for the federal government’s failure to find a permanent home for nuclear waste](#), despite collecting \$46 billion from electricity customers to do just that. San Onofre’s unique and dangerous status – as a shuttered reactor with 3.6 million pounds of “stranded” waste, stored between the ocean and a highway, in a densely populated area, atop earthquake faults – was repeatedly raised as an impetus for action.

“People see the site being dismantled, but the waste remaining,” Victor said. “They think, ‘We paid the government to remove it, and it’s not being removed.’ That’s a palpable anger.”

Victor urged Congress to move swiftly toward licensing temporary storage sites and developing transportation plans and infrastructure for moving the waste, even as it gears up to revive Nevada’s Yucca Mountain as a permanent site.

“It’s really important not to put all our eggs in one basket,” Victor said, conjuring Nevada’s staunch opposition to becoming America’s nuclear waste dump. The state has no nuclear power plants.

Americans have spent billions with nothing to show for it, O’Donnell and others said.

Electricity ratepayers have poured that \$46 billion into the Nuclear Waste Fund, and gotten nothing.

Taxpayers have paid out another \$6 billion to utilities that have sued the federal government — and won — over the fed’s failure to haul away the waste as promised.

The Department of Energy says the legal bills for breach-of-contract could total \$25 billion, but the nuclear industry estimates it could cost as much as \$50 billion.

“The cost of inaction is high,” warned Chuck Smith, Aiken County councilmember and chair of the Energy Communities Alliance from South Carolina

Rep. Darrell Issa, R-Vista, stressed the need for swift action, as did Rep. William Lacy Clay, D-St. Louis. San Onofre is not alone in its peril, Clay said: In his district, radioactive waste is buried close to an active underground fire.

“This is a moral imperative,” Clay said. “The U.S. government created a nuclear waste problem 75 years ago. It has a clear and unavoidable responsibility to finally clean it up.”

After the hearing, Victor said that the stars were aligning to advance a nuclear waste disposal bill in the House over the coming weeks. Next, he said, will come the Senate.

Read Victor’s testimony, and that of the other witnesses, [here](#).