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The House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Environment and the Economy held a hearing led by Subcommittee Chairman John Shimkus (R-IL) and Subcommittee Ranking Member Paul Tonko (D-NY) to gather information in order to move forward with federal licensing of a nuclear waste repository at Yucca Mountain, Nevada. Members of Congress, the Nye County, Nevada Commission, and private stakeholders provided testimony.

Although Yucca Mountain has been a topic of frequent debate in Congress since it was first designated a nuclear waste repository site in 1987, the Department of Energy (DOE) is not currently considering it or other locations in Nevada in their new nuclear waste strategy. Chairman Shimkus advocated for a consent-based siting process, noting that requests for involvement from Nye County locals have not been granted by the DOE.

The secure transportation of spent fuel rods dominated the conversation during the hearing. Rep. Bob Latta (R-OH) commented that a model of safe transportation would help to address safety concerns among locals and augment public confidence in the repository. Rep. Jerry McNerney (D-CA), however, voiced concerns that even with safe laws, sound science, and honest information, a deep mistrust of government will limit public approval.

Rep. Bill Johnson (R-OH) highlighted the possibility for economic growth through employment and research, and opportunities for nuclear science education that Yucca Mountain could initiate.

The Yucca Mountain repository receives strong support in the House, and the approaching retirement of Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV), a vigorous opponent of the repository, may affect Senate views on the issue.

Sources: E & E Daily, Energy and Commerce Committee, U.S. Department of Energy

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