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Home > House passes legislation to advance nuclear waste storage in New Mexico and Nevada

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May 10, 2018

On May 10, the House passed the Nuclear Waste Policy Amendments Act of 2018 (H.R. 3053) by a vote of 340 to 72, despite strong opposition from the New Mexico and Nevada delegations. The bill would resume and expedite licensing for the proposed Yucca Mountain nuclear waste repository and authorize the Department of Energy (DOE) to construct an interim storage facility for consolidation and temporary storage of nuclear waste in New Mexico until the completion of a permanent facility. Such interim facilities have long been the favored solution of the Senate when it comes to nuclear waste storage.

In 1987, Congress amended the Nuclear Waste Policy Act of 1982 to investigate Yucca Mountain for a national nuclear waste repository. The site would be the nation's first and only permanent geologic repository for high-level nuclear waste. Due to a litany of complicated issues related to safety, longevity, public opinion, and other aspects of the project, progress on establishing the Yucca Mountain facility since 1987 has been slow to stagnant.

Furthermore, the Nuclear Waste Policy Amendments Act of 2018 seeks to advance the process of permitting the Yucca Mountain project, as well as increase the cap for waste storage by 57 percent – from 70,000 metric tons to 110,000 metric tons. The bill generally carries strong bipartisan support in the House, aside from the Nevada and New Mexico lawmakers who oppose the project due to concerns about the facility's potential impacts on the health and safety of their residents and ask for a consent-based storage solution.

Now that H.R. 3053 has passed the House, it will have to pass the Senate, which may prove more daunting. In particular, Senator Dean Heller (R-NV) has fought against continuing the Yucca Mountain project in the past and stated that he will continue to do so. Heller and fellow Nevada Senator Catherine Cortez Masto (D) cosigned a letter to the Chair and Ranking Member of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Energy urging them to not appropriate funds to Yucca Mountain during the FY 2019 appropriations cycle. The FY 2019 Senate Energy and Water Development Appropriations bill (S.2975) does not include funding for Yucca Mountain storage, but the House bill (H.R.5895) would provide \$268 million to restart the adjudication of the Yucca Mountain license application – an increase of \$100 million above the president's request.

Sources: E&E News; Library of Congress; Roll Call; U.S. Department of Energy; U.S. Government Accountability Office.
