

SENATE BILL REPORT

SJM 8000

As of February 3, 2015

Brief Description: Requesting the permanent siting and development of a federal nuclear waste repository.

Sponsors: Senator Brown.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Energy, Environment & Telecommunications: 1/27/15.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY, ENVIRONMENT & TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Staff: Jan Odano (786-7486)

Background: Since the 1950s, the federal government has been investigating and screening sites to be developed as high-level radioactive waste repositories. In 1982 Congress enacted the Nuclear Waste Policy Act, which defined the federal government's responsibility to provide permanent disposal in a deep geologic repository for spent fuel and high-level radioactive waste from commercial and defense activities. Under amended provisions (1987) of this Act, the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) has the responsibility to locate, build, and operate a repository for such wastes. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) has the responsibility to establish regulations governing the construction, operation, and closure of the repository, consistent with environmental standards established by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

The 1987 amendments required DOE to evaluate only the suitability of the site at Yucca Mountain, Nevada, for a geologic disposal facility. In addition, the amendments outlined a detailed approach for the disposal of high-level radioactive waste involving review by the President, Congress, state and tribal governments, NRC, and other federal agencies.

In 2002 DOE recommended to the President, and Congress approved, that the Yucca Mountain site be developed as a long-term geologic repository for high-level waste. In April 2002, the Governor of Nevada notified Congress of his state's objection to the proposed repository. However, funding for development of Yucca Mountain waste site was terminated in 2011.

At this time there are no facilities for permanent disposal of high-level radioactive waste. Existing high-level wastes from reprocessing are presently stored at West Valley, New York;

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Hanford, Washington; Idaho Falls, Idaho; and Savannah River, South Carolina. Liquid high-level wastes are stored in large underground tanks of either stainless steel or carbon steel, depending on whether they are acid or alkaline. Some of the liquid waste has been solidified into glass, ceramic slag, salt cake, and sludge.

Summary of Bill: The Legislature requests Congress, EPA, and DOE to establish and develop a permanent federal nuclear waste repository.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: The federal government has an obligation to store nuclear waste. They have failed. Currently, nuclear waste is stored in dry casks where it is safe and secure. As the result of lawsuits, the federal government has provided payment to cover the costs of development and security of dry cask storage.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Brent Ridge, Energy-NW.