

SENATE BILL REPORT

SJM 8018

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Environment, Energy & Technology, January 30, 2020

Brief Description: Concerning a federal nuclear waste repository.

Sponsors: Senators Brown, Schoesler, Honeyford, Lovelett and Short.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Environment, Energy & Technology: 1/28/20, 1/30/20 [DP].

Brief Summary of Joint Memorial

- Requests Congress, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and the U.S. Department of Energy to establish and develop a permanent federal nuclear waste repository.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT, ENERGY & TECHNOLOGY

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Carlyle, Chair; Lovelett, Vice Chair; Ericksen, Ranking Member; Fortunato, Assistant Ranking Member, Environment; Sheldon, Assistant Ranking Member, Energy & Technology; Brown, Hobbs, Liias, McCoy, Nguyen, Rivers, Short, Stanford and Wellman.

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 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) is responsible for establishing regulations governing the construction, operation, and closure of the repository, consistent with environmental standards established by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The amendments

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also required DOE to evaluate only the suitability of the site at Yucca Mountain, Nevada, for a geologic disposal facility. 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. Funding for development of the Yucca Mountain waste site was terminated in 2011.

In 2010, a Blue Ribbon Commission on America's Nuclear Future was formed to review policies for managing nuclear waste. The commission developed a strategy and provided recommendations to the Secretary of Energy. The strategy included prompt efforts to develop one or more geologic disposal facilities; one or more consolidated storage facilities; and to prepare for eventual large-scale transport of spent nuclear fuel and high-level waste to a storage facility, when it becomes available. The strategy also included continued support for innovation in nuclear energy and work force development and a consent-based approach to siting future nuclear waste management facilities.

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; 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 Joint Memorial: The Legislature requests Congress, EPA, and DOE to establish and develop a permanent federal nuclear waste repository.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: We need a permanent solution for storing nuclear waste. Waste at Hanford is being stored above ground in metal buildings, which are not safe. The waste poses an extreme threat to the Columbia River. We need a safe repository for nuclear waste.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Sharon Brown, Prime Sponsor; Dana Miller, Yakama Nation.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.