

USNIC NEWS

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Urgent Action Needed by Congress and DOE to Address Growing Costs, Stakes From Political Impasse over Nation's Nuclear Waste Management Program

Citing growing costs to U.S. taxpayers in the billions of dollars and mounting collateral impacts on American nuclear energy, the U.S. Nuclear Infrastructure Council (USNIC) called for decisive, swift and tangible action by the Congress, the Trump Administration and the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) under Energy Secretary Perry to enact a comprehensive program for used nuclear fuel and high-level waste storage including immediate steps to re-establish the DOE's "vacated" Office of Civilian Radioactive Waste Management; re-engagement by the DOE in the ongoing NRC Yucca Mountain review; and enactment of supporting legislative provisions. The Council (www.usnic.org) is the leading business consortium for new nuclear energy and promotion of the U.S. supply chain globally.

The omnibus recommendations also include consolidated interim storage solutions with an emphasis on existing private-sector initiatives although not as a substitute for a permanent geological repository; management and funding reform over the medium term; transportation planning and execution with maximum reliance on the private-sector; research, development and demonstration of backend technologies to optimize the fuel cycle; and incentives for host communities.

According to an issue brief prepared by the Council's Backend Working Group, "the Nation's nuclear waste management program stands at an impasse, largely due to universally recognized political reasons. As a result, there is no available disposal pathway for the Nation's growing inventory of both commercial and defense used nuclear fuel and high-level waste. Currently, used fuel and high-level waste (HLW) from both commercial and defense activities remain in safe storage at 121 sites in 39 states. U.S. spent fuel inventories now exceed 75,000 metric tons at 99 operating reactors and 14 shutdown sites. It has been more than 30 years since enactment of the Nuclear Waste Policy Act (NWPA); more than 18 years since the federal government failed to meet its statutory and contractual obligation to begin removing used fuel from nuclear energy reactor sites; more than eight years since the license application review process by the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) began; and more than six years since the Obama Administration defunded the repository program and vacated the Office of Civilian Radioactive Waste Management (OCRWM).

"This impasse is costing U.S. taxpayers billions of dollars. The current estimate of federal liabilities is approximately \$25 billion and growing - an \$11 billion increase since the Obama Administration first moved to terminate the Yucca Mountain project. In addition to these mounting costs, failure to bring closure to the backend of the nuclear fuel cycle adversely impacts nuclear energy as a vital component for reliable, affordable and clean electricity - and

energy independence, jobs, exports and competitiveness. Some members of Congress have balked at funding new nuclear technology development based on the lack of a disposal pathway. For two years, after the U.S. Court of Appeals struck down its Waste Confidence Rule, the NRC placed a moratorium on new nuclear plant licenses and license renewals. Ten states have a ban or restrictions on the construction of new nuclear energy facilities in large part due to the lack of a disposition pathway for used fuel. Globally, as noted by former President Obama's own Blue Ribbon Commission on America's Nuclear Future (BRC), the continued stalemate is damaging America's international standing on issues of nuclear safety, nonproliferation and security."

The report concludes: "While the nuclear waste management program has been stymied for years in the executive and legislative branches of government, it cannot be allowed to remain so indefinitely... It is time for the new Administration to join with Congress and re-establish the Nation's leadership role in the safe, peaceful and responsible use of nuclear energy.

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The USNIC Backend Working Group is a project of the U.S. Nuclear Infrastructure Council (www.usnic.org), the leading business consortium for new nuclear energy and promotion of the U.S. supply chain globally. The views above represent a consensus of the USNIC's Backend Working Group and the Council, but do not necessarily represent the specific views of individual member companies and organizations.
