



NUCLEAR ENERGY INSTITUTE

Senate, DOE Take Steps on Nuclear Waste Management

April 1, 2015—The nuclear energy industry last week acknowledged separate moves on used fuel management from the U.S. Senate and the Obama administration as having “the potential to finally bring some progress to the nation’s long-neglected nuclear waste management policy.”

The bipartisan [Nuclear Waste Administration Act of 2015](#) was introduced March 24 with the intent “to safeguard and permanently dispose of the nation’s stockpiles of spent nuclear fuel, which are currently accumulating at separate sites across the country.”

Among the bill’s provisions are establishment of an independent “nuclear waste administration” to manage a national nuclear waste program in place of the Department of Energy. A new working fund would make utility fee collections available to the management entity without further appropriation action, although the existing balance of the Nuclear Waste Fund still would require appropriations.

The legislation also would establish a pilot interim storage facility for used fuel from shutdown nuclear power plants on a priority basis and other facilities for “non-priority” used fuel. It directs a consent-based siting process for those facilities and for a permanent repository, in line with the [recommendations of the the Blue Ribbon Commission on America's Nuclear Future](#).

NEI President and CEO Marvin Fertel said the core elements of the bill “track well with the [nuclear energy industry’s principles](#) of how a comprehensive, successful waste management program should be structured.” He said the industry looks forward to hearings on the legislation and would offer suggestions to improve the bill “where we see the need.”

“The statutorily directed construction of the Yucca Mountain project is another key element that must be part of a comprehensive program,” Fertel said.

“Consumers of electricity from nuclear power plants, and the Defense Department to a lesser amount, have committed tens of billions of dollars to the Nuclear Waste Fund to develop a repository both for commercial used nuclear fuel and defense high-level waste. The government has spent more than \$12 billion from the Waste Fund developing Yucca Mountain in accordance with the Nuclear Waste Policy Act. That program is the law of the land and should be completed.”

The bill is sponsored by Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee Chairman Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska), ranking member Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.), Senate Appropriations Energy and Water Development Chairman Lamar Alexander (R-Tenn.) and ranking member Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.). The bill mirrors a 2013 version that Sens. Murkowski and Alexander co-sponsored.

Also on March 24, [Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz announced](#) DOE’s authorization by the president to move forward on planning a separate repository for defense-origin high-level radioactive wastes. These wastes have been slated for co-disposal in the Yucca Mountain repository with used nuclear fuel from commercial reactors. Moniz said the repository as well as the interim used fuel storage facilities would be developed using a consent-based approach as called for in [DOE’s 2013 strategy](#) for implementing the Blue Ribbon Commission’s recommendations.

“It was appropriate to hear the secretary endorse the industry’s fervent belief that the disposal pathways and the obligations for managing DOE’s high-level waste and commercial used nuclear fuel should be addressed simultaneously, not sequentially,” Fertel said.

“Responsible stewardship of used nuclear fuel from the production of electricity with nuclear energy is a priority for our industry and should be for the federal government.”