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Biz Beat Blog

Senate panel gives boost to Texas firm's bid to store nuclear waste



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WASHINGTON—The Texas company seeking to store the nation's high-level spent nuclear fuel got a boost today, when a Senate subcommittee forwarded to the full appropriations committee a bill that would authorize the Department of Energy to contract with a private company to store some of that spent and highly radioactive nuclear waste. (The video above is from the company's February presentation on its plans.)

The bill authorizes a pilot program to remove spent fuel from permanently decommissioned nuclear sites, seen as a first step to eventually designating a storage site for all the fuel being kept on the sites of active nuclear power plants.

Waste Control Specialists, a subsidiary of a Dallas-based holding company previously owned by the late Harold Simmons and still controlled by his family, wants to store the waste at its vast facility in rural Andrews County. Already there are tons of low-level radioactive waste, but this program would be much different. America's nation's spent nuclear fuel has never been shipped away from the sites where it was generated before.

For decades, the plan has been to permanently store the waste under Yucca Mountain in Nevada, but that plan has been stalled for years.

In February, **the company announced plans** to formally request a permit from the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to build such a facility.

Since then, however, a second firm, located just across the state line in New Mexico, has announced similar plans. Two rural New Mexico counties have formed a partnership to make a pitch for accepting the nuclear waste, and the states governor has sent a letter to the Department of Energy expressing support.

On Tuesday, WCS President Rod Baltzer praised the Senate in a blog post. He said the Energy Department will have to first take title to any waste that leaves a federal plant before a private firm could risk accepting it.

“I am thrilled that this language has been included in the initial subcommittee markup. Senators Alexander and Feinstein are the Senate leaders on this issue and to have their support for this important project is very gratifying,” Baltzer said. “We all realize that securing a pathway for the Department of Energy to take title to the waste and contract with a storage site is the first issue that must be addressed and this is a good start.”

The subcommittee approval sends the **\$35.4 billion measure**, of which the waste provisions are only one small part, to the full committee for consideration on Thursday.