

Congressman Jon Porter (R-NV-3)
Subcommittee on Energy and Water Quality
March 10, 2005

Mr. Chairman, thank you for providing me the opportunity to testify today. As I am sure you can imagine, the Yucca Mountain issue remains an intensely personal issue to myself and to my fellow Nevadans as well.

I have been in public office for over twenty years of my life. Throughout these twenty years, I have fought on behalf of Southern Nevadans on many issues. In looking back, one issue stands tall above the rest as THE “push-button” issue for Nevadans—Yucca Mountain. Therefore, Mr. Chairman, I am here today to express my vehement opposition to this project on behalf of my constituents in Southern Nevada.

Throughout the fight against Yucca Mountain, one thing seems to be proven time and time again—Yucca Mountain has yet to be proven a safe repository to dump our nations’ high-level nuclear waste. Since 1987, when Yucca Mountain was named the only site to be considered further, billions upon billions of dollars have been spent on this ill-fated project, only to have study after study prove that Yucca is not the solid formation it was once thought to be. Earthquakes, water percolation, transportation and radiological safety standards have plagued the Yucca Mountain project, yet we continue this fight year after year. I wish we knew in 1987 what we know now.

Located only 80 miles from Las Vegas, and even closer to the quickly-growing city of Pahrump, Yucca Mountain is becoming more and more of a threat to the health and safety of Southern Nevadans, as well as the millions of Americans, with every day that it is being considered as our nation’s nuclear waste repository. The Yucca Mountain project will directly impact 44 states and many major metropolitan areas, including Chicago, Toledo, Los Angeles, Dallas, Pittsburg, and Denver, as millions of shipments of high-level nuclear waste is trucked, shipped, and sent by train through these areas.

Mr. Chairman, I disagree with Yucca Mountain on many different fronts, but the reason for this hearing today is to talk about funding options. Last year, funding for Yucca Mountain was cut significantly. This year, the Energy Department’s top nuclear manager has publicly acknowledged that Yucca is falling behind schedule. This has frustrated proponents of Yucca Mountain, causing them to look toward other “solutions” to put Yucca Mountain back on track. One of the options that has been mentioned frequently is taking some of the funds generated under the Nuclear Waste Fund to help pay for Yucca Mountain.

Although, to some, this approach may seem like a short-term solution to the funding issues surrounding Yucca Mountain, I am of the firm belief that giving its proponents a “blank check” to complete the construction of this project will end up putting all Americans at risk. As you know, the transportation and storage of high-level nuclear

waste is not an issue to ignore, especially in a post September 11th world. Shipping 77,000 metric tons of dangerous radioactive nuclear waste by removing it from reactor sites around the country, and putting it on trucks, trains and barges, and moving it through cities, towns and waterways across America is a dangerous scheme and we, as Congress, cannot afford any missteps along the way.

Now is definitely not the time to lessen managerial oversight over this project, and with all of the problems currently looming over the Yucca Mountain, we as Members of Congress, cannot lessen our oversight over a project that we have not even seen final safety standards on. The American people deserve more from us than wasting our time throwing billions of dollars at a project that has spent too long already at the public trough.

For this reason, I, on behalf of the people of Nevada, insist that this body maintain its oversight authority over such potentially dangerous projects. Taking an item off-budget is reserved for issues of national interest that far surpass the completion of Yucca Mountain. Just because the project may not be as “on track” as it should be does not mean that we, as Members, should try to force it to move any faster. This also sets a dangerous precedent for all projects across the country that do not meet an arbitrary master plan. Any budgetary gimmicks like this are dangerous and cannot be allowed.

Mr. Chairman, last year I testified before the Subcommittee on Energy and Water Quality regarding this same issue, and my message remains the same: We are all here to represent millions of people from across the country. These constituents have instilled their faith in each of us to make tough decisions to protect not only their interests and tax dollars, but their health and safety as well. In attempting to find other ways to fund Yucca Mountain, whose interests are being served- the health and safety of our constituents, or the balance sheets of the nuclear utility companies?

Again, Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I will continue to join the other members of Nevada’s delegation in representing the overwhelming majority of Nevadans who oppose Yucca Mountain, and I would be happy to answer any questions the panel may have.

* * *