



COMMITTEE ON  
**ENERGY & COMMERCE**  
DEMOCRATS  
RANKING MEMBER FRANK PALLONE, JR.

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Pallone Remarks at Markup of Nuclear Waste Bills**

**Washington, D.C.** – *Energy and Commerce Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr. (D-NJ) delivered the following opening remarks today at a Subcommittee on Environment markup of H.R. 2278, “the Responsible Disposal Reauthorization Act of 2017” and H.R. 2389, “To reauthorize the West Valley demonstration project, and for other purposes:”*

Today’s markup focuses on two bipartisan bills that deal with important nuclear legacy waste cleanups in Colorado and New York.

H.R. 2278, the Responsible Disposal Reauthorization Act of 2017, would address the safe disposal of uranium mill tailings, a sandy byproduct of the uranium milling process. In Grand Junction, Colorado, uranium mill tailings were offered to the community as fill material before the health risks of the radioactive material were fully understood. The tailings were subsequently used in the construction of local homes, roads, sidewalks, parks and schools. The Uranium Mill Tailings Radiation Control Act of 1978 created 19 disposal cells for the radioactive waste, but the last of the disposal cells is set to close in September 2023. H.R. 2278 extends the cell’s closure date to September 2048, or until the cell is filled, whichever comes first.

Congress has already extended the closure date of the disposal cell several times. Although I recognize the importance of having a permanent disposal site for this radioactive waste, I am unsure if this is the appropriate time frame. Unfortunately, our technical questions submitted for the record to the Department of Energy (DOE) on this issue have not yet been answered.

The second bill before us focuses on New York. The Western New York Nuclear Service Center was an experimental project to reprocess spent nuclear fuel in West Valley. Since 1986, DOE and New York State have debated whether the nuclear waste at the site is a result of atomic energy defense activity, but as time passes, the cost of remediation grows. The West Valley site operated between 1966 and 1972. During that time approximately 60 percent of the spent nuclear fuel reprocessed at the site came from the DOE’s Hanford Site, with 80 percent of the reprocessed plutonium being returned to Hanford and used in Department of Defense nuclear weapons testing.

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H.R. 2389 would resolve this longstanding disagreement. First, the bill authorizes \$75 million dollars to facilitate the cleanup of the West Valley site for each fiscal year from 2017 through 2026. Second – and most importantly – the bill designates the radioactive waste at the West Valley site to be waste resulting from atomic energy defense activities. Unfortunately, an amendment in the nature of a substitute would strike provision and replace it with a GAO study. This amendment removes the heart of the bill, and offers no path forward to DOE or to New York State.

Still, I'm glad we're discussing the issue. Both bills address important cleanups, and I look forward to working with my colleagues as the proposals continue through the Committee process.

Thank you, I yield back.

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