Spent Fuel Political Landscape

An unfortunate part of the bigger picture

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Current Political Landscape - General

• Hyper partisanship
• Political gain outweighs country’s long-term needs
• Governance by appropriations and executive action

Note: The acronym HLW refers collectively to highly radioactive waste from reprocessing and spent nuclear fuel.
HLW - How We Got Here

- Nuclear Waste Policy Act of 1982
- Nuclear Waste Policy Act Amendments of 1987
- Yucca Mountain Site Recommendation of 2002
- Obama Administration Attempt to Cancel Yucca Mountain in 2010 and End of Appropriations
- Trump Administration Request for Appropriations for FY17, FY18 and FY19 (House Yes, Senate Soft No)
Recent Political Landscape - HLW

• U.S. policy is for disposal of HLW in a geologic repository at Yucca Mountain
• 115th Congress (2017-2019)
  – Administration support for Yucca Mountain
  – House: Bipartisan support for appropriations for Yucca Mountain; passed Nuclear Waste Policy Amendments Act
  – Senate: Bipartisan support for appropriations for consolidated interim storage (CIS); no authorizing accomplishments
  – “Grand Compromise” of Yucca Mountain and CIS never materialized
• 116th Congress: House under Democratic control
  – Many new faces
  – Less influence for Yucca Mountain proponent Rep. John Shimkus (R-IL)
  – Democratic leadership attention focused elsewhere
  – Rep. Susie Lee (D-NV) stated she obtained assurances that Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) would oppose Yucca Mountain
Current Political Landscape – HLW (cont.)

• 116th Congress: Senate
  – Some new faces
  – Roadblock to Senate Republican leadership support for Yucca Mountain removed when Senator Heller (R-NV) lost his re-election bid
  – Some Senate Democrats inclined to oppose Yucca Mountain due to opposition from the two Democratic Nevada senators
  – Appropriations Energy Subcommittee Chair Senator Alexander (R-TN) reiterated support for Yucca Mountain and getting something done on HLW
FY2020 Appropriations

• Continued Trump Administration support for Yucca Mountain anticipated
• Senate appropriators could support funding for both Yucca Mountain and CIS
• Unclear how much House Democratic support for Yucca Mountain will continue
• Backdrop of mixed government and overall gridlock – will any appropriations bills be passed?
Observations

• Short-term political considerations continue to outweigh long-term needs of the country
• Less focus on HLW
• Some incentives for political action
  – Desire to move spent fuel out of state (e.g., California)
  – Concern that HLW impasse may stymie advanced nuclear energy systems
  – Pressure from communities with defense HLW
Conclusions

• “Grand Compromise” in appropriations (Yucca Mountain plus CIS) remains best hope for near-term progress

• Stalemate can continue indefinitely but Yucca Mountain viability may not
Recommendations

• Educate new members of Congress
• Raise the stakes
• Hold Yucca Mountain opponents accountable
• Plan B?