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Lawmakers summon nuclear chief to testify about waste site

Julian Hattem, The Hill

August 23, 2013

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Legislators in the House want the head of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) to answer questions about the agency's efforts to decide whether or not to approve the Yucca Mountain nuclear waste site in Nevada.

Reps. Fred Upton (R-Mich.) and John Shimkus (R-Ill.), the heads of the Energy and Commerce Committee and its subcommittee on the Environment and the Economy, asked Allison Macfarlane on Friday to appear before the subcommittee at a hearing in September.

They want her to answer questions about the status of the NRC's review of the dump site, which a federal appeals court last week ordered it to resume.

"Our country has invested 30 years and \$15 billion in determining

whether Yucca Mountain would be a safe repository," they wrote in a letter to the NRC. "The NRC is this nation's nuclear safety regulator and its reputation for independence and objectivity rests on its transparency in this matter. As such, NRC's objective, scientific findings regarding the safety of Yucca Mountain would provide the public an independent, authoritative assessment of this important project."

Congress called for the site to be built in the 1980s, but President Obama ordered that the NRC halt its review of the Yucca Mountain site in 2010. He promised to kill the project in Nevada, where local officials have largely opposed it, during the 2008 presidential campaign.

A ruling from the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit, however, called that action illegal and ordered the agency to get back to work.

The NRC has previously claimed that it did not have enough money to finish the review.

The House lawmakers want the NRC to release a safety evaluation report on the proposed site as well as monthly progress reports and an explanation about the steps the agency has taken to comply with the court order.

Shimkus and Upton requested that the hearing take place on September 10.

Treasury tells Congress nation will breach debt ceiling in mid-October

Peter Schroeder, The Hill
August 26, 2013 [LINK](#)

The Treasury Department told Congress on Monday it must raise the \$16.7 trillion national debt limit by mid-October.

Treasury Secretary Jack Lew in a letter to lawmakers said his department would exhaust the "extraordinary measures" it holds to keep the U.S. from breaching the limit at that time.

"Congress should act as soon as possible to meet its responsibility to the nation and to remove the threat of default," he wrote. "Under any circumstance -- in light of the schedule, the inherent viability of cash flows, and the dire consequences of miscalculation -- Congress must act before the middle of October."

Lew's deadline would set up a crucial few weeks for the White House and Congress when lawmakers return to Washington next month. The government will shut down on Oct. 1 unless Congress approves a measure to keep it funded. Only nine legislative days are scheduled in September.

Shortly after Lew's letter became public, the White House reiterated its stance on raising the debt limit -- it is not up for debate.

"Let me reiterate what our position is, and it is unequivocal -- we will not

negotiate with Republicans in Congress over bills Congress has racked up," said White House Press Secretary Jay Carney. "We have never defaulted and we must never default."

Meanwhile, a spokesman for Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio) fired back, saying the debt limit is "a reminder that, under President Obama, Washington has failed to deal seriously with America's debt and deficit."

Republicans have signaled an interest in joining the debate over government funding with the debate over raising the debt ceiling, which could give the party more leverage in talks with the White House.

Boehner told his conference Thursday that he wanted to advance a short-term continuing resolution to keep the government funded for one or two months. The measure would be set at the level of the sequester, which imposed automatic spending cuts on the government.

Conservative members want to use the government funding measure to defund ObamaCare, a move Boehner has not embraced.

Democrats want to replace sequester spending cuts with a mix of revenue increases.

After the release of Lew's letter, they began quickly calling for Republicans to agree to promptly hike the debt limit, citing the 2011 debt limit standoff that roiled markets and led to the first-ever downgrade of the nation's credit rating.

"Republicans must return to Congress prepared to move beyond the kind of brinkmanship that undermined our economic recovery two years ago," said Rep. Sandy Levin (D-Mich.), the ranking member of the House Ways and Means Committee. "It is time for Republicans to do the right thing - not the far right thing - and put the American economy first."

Lew said the government would have about \$50 billion cash on hand in mid-October, putting the nation in an "unacceptable position" if Congress does not act to raise the debt ceiling.

He wrote that he could not predict how long that cash would last or whether the government would bring in enough money on a given day to cover bills come due.

The Treasury began employing "extraordinary measures" to free up cash to keep the nation up to date with its existing obligations in May.

Fiscal Fights Looming, Can Simpson-Bowles Group Get Congress to Move?

Chris Frates, National Journal

August 27, 2013

[LINK](#)

With its bipartisan branding, boldface names, and big money, the Campaign to Fix the Debt muscled its way into Washington power politics last summer. But as Congress preps for yet another fiscal showdown,

Democrats and Republicans doubt the group has the swat to push either side far enough toward the center to secure its holy grail: a grand bargain that includes entitlement-spending reforms and new revenues that reduce the deficit.

Not even a \$25 million war chest is enough to convince congressional insiders that the coalition has the juice to break the partisan impasse. By advocating for entitlement reforms, which Democrats dislike, and new revenues, which Republicans reject, the group may have only succeeded in convincing each party that they aren't pushing the other side hard enough.

"I don't think they advocate incredibly strongly or effectively," said a Senate Democratic aide. "For how much money they have, they should be more effective."

Another Democrat, a Senate leadership aide, put it this way, "They'd get farther if they would be willing to push Republicans on revenues as part of the debt discussion."

And then there's the Republican take: "For Fix the Debt to be successful they have to do a lot of work on the other side of the aisle," said a senior GOP Senate aide. "That's where Fix the Debt's challenges are going to be, on the left. Reform is hard."

The Senate Democratic aide, who is familiar with the group's workings, argued that the group's importance has lessened since the fiscal-cliff battles. As the country approached last year's deadline that would have raised taxes and triggered across-the-board spending cuts, lawmakers panicked. Fix the Debt, the aide said, swooped in and expertly played the role of bipartisan educators.

But this time around, the debates are familiar, as lawmakers discuss funding the government beyond Sept. 30 and raising the government's borrowing limit.

"People aren't really scared, certainly like they were leading up to the fiscal cliff," the aide said.

Not to mention that some Democrats view Fix the Debt warily because it's funded by big businesses including General Electric, which gave \$1 million to its parent organization, and JP Morgan Chase, which gave the campaign \$500,000. Some Democrats argue that the group tilts conservative.

Fix the Debt spokesman Jon Romano says the group is even better prepared for this fall's looming fiscal showdown than it was for last year's fiscal cliff. Since then, the group has increased its state network by 60 percent and is now active in 33 states and has 625 committee members, 120 former representatives and senators, and 2,500 small-business members.

"Anybody who thinks this campaign was going to go away after the inaction of the last year is just kidding themselves. We're more equipped now for this next phase than we were, frankly, during the fiscal cliff," Romano said. "Our message is going to be loud and clear: We need

Congress and the president to put a debt deal in place."

The group plans to push Congress to reconsider the across-the-board spending cuts that went into place earlier this year, painting it as an issue that hurts everyday Americans.

"Fifty-seven thousand kids aren't going to have Head Start because Congress couldn't fix the debt," he said. "One hundred and thirty-six thousand families aren't going to have rental assistance because Congress couldn't fix the debt."

But perhaps more convincing than any rhetoric is the group's billfold. It has the resources to make a lot of noise but has yet to use them effectively. But that may be changing.

According to a source familiar with the campaign's strategy, Fix the Debt is considering using some of that cash to exert influence through campaign politics. "Twenty-five million dollars is a lot of money. Members don't want to go into their reelection with another headache and there aren't many groups that have that kind of money."

Indeed, that cash buys a lot of organization. The group has sent 150,000 letters to lawmakers, placed 150 state op-eds, and held a July fly-in where 55 people from 19 states held 73 meetings that generated 40 media mentions in 19 markets. And the group plans to do print, TV, and online advertising in targeted districts, Romano said.

But Romano acknowledged there is only so much outside groups can do to push lawmakers toward a deal.

"There's not going to be a deal because of pressure from outside groups like this. There's going to be a deal because they want to lead on this," Romano said. "We're going to put as much pressure as possible on them to get a deal done."

Moniz reshuffles Energy Dept. advisory board

Ben Geman, The Hill

August 26, 2013

[LINK](#)

The Energy Department (DOE) has a new slate of outside experts to help guide the agency and new Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz.

The department on Monday announced the latest roster for the Secretary of Energy Advisory Board (SEAB).

MIT's John Deutch, a former top DOE official who was already a board member, will co-chair alongside Persis Drell, the former director of the Stanford Linear Accelerator Center.

The SEAB was dismantled under the George W. Bush administration but revived under President Obama's first Energy secretary, Steven Chu. The next meeting is in mid-September. Here's the whole roster, per

DOE's website:

- Frances Beinecke - President, Natural Resources Defense Council
- Rafael Bras - Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs, Georgia Institute of Technology
- Albert Carnesale - Chancellor Emeritus and Professor, University of California, Los Angeles
- Shirley Ann Jackson - President, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute
- Deborah Jin - Physicist, National Institute of Standards and Technology and Professor Adjoint for Physics at the University of Colorado, Boulder
- Paul Joskow - President, Alfred P. Sloan Foundation and MIT Professor of Economics, Emeritus
- Steve Koonin - Director, Center for Urban Science and Progress, New York University and Former Under Secretary for Science
- Michael McQuade - Senior Vice President, United Technologies Corporation
- Richard Meserve - President, Carnegie Institution for Science and Former Chairman, US Nuclear Regulatory Commission
- Cherry Murray - Dean, Harvard University School of Engineering and Applied Sciences
- John Podesta - Chair, Center for American Progress and Former White House Chief of Staff
- Dan Reicher - Executive Director, Steyer-Taylor Center for Energy Policy and Finance, Professor, Stanford University and Former Assistant Secretary for Energy
- Carmichael Roberts - General Partner, North Bridge Venture Partners
- Martha Schlicher - Renewables and Sustainability Technology Lead, Monsanto Company
- Brent Scowcroft - Retired U.S. Lieutenant General, Former National Security Advisor and President and Founder, Scowcroft Group Ram Shenoy Chief Technology Officer, ConocoPhillips
- Daniel Yergin - Vice Chairman, IHS and Founder of IHS Cambridge Energy Research Associates

U.S. Department of Energy Provides Additional Funding to Support B&W mPower(TM) Project

Babcock & Wilcox

August 27, 2013

[LINK](#)

The Babcock & Wilcox Company (B&W) (NYSE: BWC) announced today that the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) has allocated an additional \$20.5 million in funding to its Cooperative Agreement with Babcock & Wilcox mPower, Inc. (B&W mPower) under the Small Modular Reactor Licensing Technical Support Program.

With this most recent \$20.5 million allocation, the full commitment of the Department to the initial budget period has now been made available to B&W mPower under the program. The first installment of \$79 million was allocated by the DOE upon the signing of the formal agreement with B&W mPower in April 2013. The DOE has also provided approximately

\$2 million to national laboratories to perform important analyses and evaluation work related to this project, bringing the total DOE investment to \$101 million during this initial project period. It is the intent of the DOE to provide additional funding to the project subject to incremental appropriations from Congress and B&W mPower's compliance with the terms of the agreement.

"This additional funding allocation from the DOE further demonstrates the U.S. government's commitment to supporting private industry in the development and deployment of small modular reactor technology," said Christofer M. Mowry, President of B&W mPower, Inc. "We remain on an aggressive schedule toward the anticipated commercial operation of the Clinch River mPower Plant near Oak Ridge, Tenn., by 2022 and appreciate the DOE's support as we move closer to delivering this vital technology to the global energy market."

The signing of the Cooperative Agreement formalized B&W's cost-share agreement with the DOE, following the selection of the mPower America team -- comprised of B&W, the Tennessee Valley Authority and Generation mPower -- as the winner of DOE's competitively bid funding opportunity. B&W mPower and Bechtel (who together formed Generation mPower LLC) will provide licensing and engineering support for the mPower America Project.

The B&W mPower reactor is an advanced integral pressurized water reactor designed to generate 180 MW of electricity. The reactor incorporates technology innovations which advance the state-of-the-art in nuclear plant safety, security and economics.

About B&W

Headquartered in Charlotte, N.C., The Babcock & Wilcox Company is a leader in clean energy technology and services, primarily for the nuclear, fossil and renewable power markets, as well as a premier advanced technology and mission critical defense contractor. B&W has locations worldwide and employs approximately 12,000 people, in addition to approximately 10,400 joint venture employees. Learn more at www.babcock.com.

About TVA

The Tennessee Valley Authority is a corporate agency of the United States that provides electricity for business customers and local power distributors serving 9 million people in parts of seven southeastern states. TVA receives no taxpayer funding, deriving virtually all of its revenues from sales of electricity. In addition to operating and investing its revenues in its electric system, TVA provides flood control, navigation and land management for the Tennessee River system and assists local power companies and state and local governments with economic development and job creation. www.tva.gov.

About Bechtel

Bechtel is among the most respected engineering, project management,

and construction companies in the world. We stand apart for our ability to get the job done right -- no matter how big, how complex, or how remote. Bechtel operates through five global business units that specialize in civil infrastructure; power generation, communications, and transmission; mining and metals; oil, gas, and chemicals; and government services. Since its founding in 1898, Bechtel has worked on more than 22,000 projects in 140 countries on all seven continents. Today, our 53,000 employees team with customers, partners, and suppliers on diverse projects in nearly 50 countries. For more information about Bechtel visit www.bechtel.com.

Cautionary Statement Regarding Forward Looking Statements

B&W cautions that this release contains forward-looking statements relating to B&W mPower's expected receipt of funding from DOE and management's plans and expectations regarding the commercial operation of mPower plants. These forward-looking statements are based on management's current expectations and involve a number of risks and uncertainties, including, among other things, our inability to finance or manage costs associated with our mPower research and development efforts, adverse changes in the demand for or competitiveness of nuclear power, our inability to comply with the terms and provisions of our cost-sharing agreement with DOE, changes as a result of regulatory oversight by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission or other U.S. Government agencies, and other factors discussed under the heading "Risk Factors," in our filings with the Securities and Exchange Commission, including our annual report on Form 10-K for the year ended December 31, 2012 and subsequent quarterly reports on Form 10-Q. If one or more of these risks or other risks materialize, actual events may vary materially from those expressed. B&W cautions not to place undue reliance on these forward-looking statements, which speak only as of the date of this release, and undertakes no obligation to update or revise any forward-looking statement, except to the extent required by applicable law.

Nuclear waste in Oregon should be stored at Hanford, former DOE Hanford manager says

Annette Cary, Tri-City Herald

August 23, 2013

[LINK](#)

The Tri-City area should volunteer to take the used nuclear fuel from Oregon's closed Trojan reactor and store it at Hanford until the nation has a permanent repository, said Mike Lawrence, the former top Department of Energy Hanford manager.

He spoke about Hanford at the Columbia Basin Badger Club meeting Friday, saying that Hanford tank leaks are not of immediate concern but that concerns about the vitrification plant's safe and efficient operation are reasonable.

Lawrence was the DOE Hanford manager from 1984-90 and signed the Tri-Party Agreement, which has regulated Hanford cleanup, in 1989.

The Blue Ribbon Commission on America's Nuclear Future has proposed that used commercial nuclear fuel be stored until 2048 in states that volunteer to house it until a national repository is available for the fuel and also high-level radioactive defense waste from Hanford and other DOE sites. Communities could receive some economic reward for volunteering.

Hanford already is a temporary storage site by default because no national repository likely will be available in the coming decades for waste that was planned to be sent to the Yucca Mountain, Nev., repository, where work is no longer under way.

But it's unlikely that the community will see any economic benefit for that, Lawrence said.

If the community agreed to take the 34 canisters of used fuel stored in Rainier, Ore., across the Columbia River from Washington, it would be a minuscule addition to what already is at Hanford, Lawrence said. It could be shipped up the Columbia River, just as the Trojan reactor vessel was before it was stored at the trench used to hold Navy reactor compartments at Hanford, he said.

Hanford has a projected 9,700 canisters of glassified waste from the vitrification plant and 2,347 tons of irradiated Hanford fuel, never processed to remove weapons plutonium, that are planned to be shipped to a national repository when one is available.

By taking the Trojan fuel, "it shows we are willing to be part of the solution," Lawrence said. The area also could be rewarded with economic benefits or projects that would create jobs, he said.

On Hanford environmental cleanup, Lawrence said work should proceed with deliberate speed for environmental and ethical reasons.

But the five underground tanks suspected to be leaking are not a crisis, he said. In the past, 67 of Hanford's tanks are suspected of leaking an estimated 1 million gallons of radioactive waste into the ground, but that was believed to have been stopped when pumpable liquids were removed.

However, in February, Washington Gov. Jay Inslee was told by then-Energy Secretary Steven Chu that the five tanks, including two not known to have leaked previously, appeared to be losing waste. The waste is left from the World War II and Cold War production of plutonium for the nation's nuclear weapons program.

Two of the tanks may be losing waste at the rate of 300 gallons a year.

The leaks are equivalent to a kitchen faucet dripping once every eight seconds for a year, Lawrence said. That's inconsequential compared to the billions of gallons of contaminated liquid released into the ground at Hanford in the past, he said.

He combed DOE reports until he found figures showing that if nothing were done to address tank waste, radioactive technetium 99 would reach its maximum concentration near the shores of the Columbia River in the year 2999 and radioactive iodine 129 would reach its maximum concentration in the year 4840. Other isotopes would be more likely to cling to the soil rather than moving into the groundwater toward the river.

The vitrification plant and making sure that it operates as it should when it is finished are more of a concern to him, he said.

Other expensive nuclear projects have failed to work, he said. That includes a fuel reprocessing plant built in Illinois in the 1970s based on technology that worked when tested on a small scale but not when the full-scale plant was completed.

That's not to say he expects the vitrification plant to fail, he said.

However, Chu was right to begin taking a close look at the vitrification plant, but that was almost a year ago, he said.

"The concern about the vitrification plant operability was reasonable, but make a decision and get on with it," Lawrence said.

He also recommended that officials in Washington, D.C., ease their tight control over communication at Hanford. Media questions often are referred to public information specialists there rather than being answered immediately by people at Hanford with first-hand and in-depth knowledge.

"I'd like to see D.C. open up so people like you get real answers," he told the Badger Club.

The Hanford contractors also need to be talking about the technical aspects of cleanup on which they are the experts, he said.

Contract To Manage Sandia National Laboratory Temporarily Extended

Global Security Newswire

August 23, 2013

[LINK](#)

The National Nuclear Security Administration has temporarily extended Lockheed Martin's contract to manage Sandia National Laboratories, the Albuquerque Journal reported.

The agreement to manage the nuclear weapons research center now will extend six months beyond its Sept. 30 expiration date until March 2014, according to the newspaper. NNSA said in 2011 that it would accept competing bids for the contract, but that process has since stalled and it has yet to issue a formal request for proposals.

NNSA officials declined to give a reason for the delay or comment on

what would happen after March, the newspaper reported. The delay comes amid an unresolved conflict over the contract to manage the agency's Pantex nuclear weapons plant in Texas and the Y-12 national security facility in Tennessee. The agency initially awarded the contract to a consortium led by Lockheed Martin and Bechtel earlier this year, but competing bidders appealed the decision.

The renewal of contracts at other NNSA facilities also has come under scrutiny during the past year. Watchdog groups and Government Accountability Office officials have raised concerns that the agency renewed deals involving Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico and Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California.

OPB airs new documentary on history of Hanford Nuclear Reservation

Steve Law, Portland Tribune

August 22, 2013

[LINK](#)

Oregon Public Broadcasting is set to air a one-hour "Oregon Experience" video documentary on the history of the Hanford Nuclear Reservation. The complex near Richland, Wash. is the site of one of the world's most expensive environmental cleanups and a huge repository of nuclear waste.

The television program tracks the history of the nuclear complex, starting in 1943, when it became a vital but highly secret player in the U.S. war effort. Hanford was the nation's manufacturing site for plutonium, one of three major components for the atomic bombs dropped over Japan in 1945 and led to the Japanese surrender.

Hanford was shot on location, and includes footage inside the B-reactor there, the first full-scale nuclear reactor in the world, now being preserved as a National Historic Landmark.

OPB will air the show Monday, Sept. 16, at 9 p.m. That day, OPB's "Think Out Loud" radio talk show will discuss the environmental cleanup effort and related Hanford topics.

A special preview showing of the documentary will take place in Richland on Thursday, Sept. 12, at 7 p.m., at the public library there.

Group pushes idea of nuclear storage in Miss.

Houston Chronicle

August 24, 2013

[LINK](#)

JACKSON, Miss. (AP) -- A nonprofit group tied to energy businesses says Mississippi should consider becoming a storage place for used nuclear fuel.

Representatives of the Mississippi Energy Institute will meet Monday at the state Capitol with the Senate Economic Development Committee. After that, they'll have a closed-door meeting at the Old Capitol Inn with business people and Republican U.S. Reps. Alan Nunnelee and Gregg Harper.

Proponents say that since opponents appear to have blocked federal plans to store the country's nuclear waste at Yucca Mountain, Nev., there's an opportunity to bring billions of dollars and create thousands of jobs by storing it in Mississippi. They say that because the federal government has moved slowly in creating centralized storage sites, nuclear plants, such as Entergy's Grand Gulf plant in Port Gibson, Miss., are storing used nuclear fuel in above-ground casks on site.

"When the U.S. decides to have a nuclear power renaissance, tremendous industry will come from that -- there will be huge investment and job creation," said Patrick Sullivan, president of the Mississippi Energy Institute. "Whatever the next renaissance in nuclear technologies will be, we believe it will take place adjacent to consolidated storage facilities."

Louie Miller is state director for an environmental group, the Sierra Club. He told The Clarion-Ledger (<http://on.thec-l.com/1dcPhdE>) on Friday that the storage proposal is a bad idea. He said there was public backlash over a similar proposal to store nuclear waste in the Richton salt domes in south Mississippi in the 1980s.

"You've got to be kidding me. We went through this fight 30 years ago," Miller said. "Does Mississippi not have a bad enough image problem nationally without becoming a radioactive dump for the U.S. and probably the rest of the world? . I don't care how many jobs it creates, if any. Think of how many it would destroy. This is a bad idea. This is something you don't want in your backyard."

But Sullivan said, "Bad perceptions of the nuclear fuel industry are just that, perceptions. The industry has the best safety record of any in the U.S. Not a single person has died as a result of radioactivity from the industry in the U.S."

Republican Gov. Phil Bryant has pushed to diversify energy options. "The governor continues to look at other nuclear opportunities and is interested in learning more about this," Bryant spokesman Mick Bullock said Friday.

A white paper from the Mississippi Energy Institute says the state has the chance to "structure a consent-based host agreement that delivers significant economic development, employment and security benefits."

It says in the short term a storage area would see a \$500 million site with almost 100 jobs and highway and transportation upgrades to safely bring in the material. Then, the report says, a storage area would see midterm infrastructure and recycling investments of more than \$15 billion and creation of more than 18,000 direct jobs during construction and 5,000 jobs for the next 50 years.

In the long term, the report says, "Mississippi's unique geologic salt domes provide an opportunity for co-located repository facilities, making Mississippi most competitive with the ability to fully manage all materials in one area . estimates for long-term disposal costs are roughly \$100 billion over the project life of 100 years."

