

# ECA Update: July 11, 2014



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## **House passes sixth '15 appropriations bill**

The Hill

July 10, 2014

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The House late Thursday evening passed its sixth fiscal 2015 appropriations bill, to fund the Department of Energy and the Army Corps of Engineers.

Passage of the \$34 billion measure, 253-170, marks the halfway point in the House's consideration of fiscal 2015 appropriations. Meanwhile, the Senate has not passed any appropriations bills for the fiscal year starting Oct. 1 due to a disagreement over amendments. A stopgap funding measure, also known as a continuing resolution, appears likely to keep the government running and avoid a shutdown through the midterm elections.

Nonetheless, the House is poised to consider more appropriations this month. Next week, the House will debate the Financial Services measure funding the Internal Revenue Service, federal payments for the District of Columbia and Wall Street enforcement agencies.

Asked by The Hill on Thursday if the House would consider more appropriations bills after Financial Services, House Appropriations Committee Chairman Hal Rogers (R-Ky.) said only, "We'll see."

The House has passed five other fiscal 2015 appropriations bills: Military Construction-Veterans Affairs, Legislative Branch, Commerce-Justice-Science, Transportation-Housing and Urban Development and Defense. The legislation's spending allocation is \$50.5 million less than the current

level, but \$326.9 million more than the administration's request.

The White House issued a veto threat against the Energy-Water measure due to controversial provisions that limit environmental regulations.

One provision would prohibit the Corps from working on a modification to a 2008 regulation defining "fill material," which is the waste left over from mining operations like mountain top removal. Another controversial rider would block the Corps from working on a rule with the Environmental Protection Agency to clarify its jurisdictional authority over streams and wetlands in the U.S.

House Republicans pushed for the riders to limit what they viewed as executive overreach.

"The legislation ... puts the brakes on the administration's destructive and misguided regulatory agenda that threatens our nation's small businesses and other industries," Rogers said during floor debate.

But Democrats warned that obstructing regulatory efforts would threaten public health.

"By preemptively stopping any efforts to update the definition of fill materials, this bill ensures that communities in coal country will continue to live with public health threats and the environmental consequences of mountaintop removal mining," said Rep. Nita Lowey (D-N.Y.), the top Democrat on the House Appropriations Committee.

As with other appropriations bills, the Energy-Water measure was considered under an open rule that allows members to offer an unlimited number of amendments.

Earlier Thursday, the House rejected efforts to abandon development of a nuclear waste repository at Yucca Mountain. Nevada lawmakers tried to convince colleagues to abandon the building of a nuclear waste facility in their state. But other members said that it would be wasteful to completely do away with the potential facility after the federal government has already invested millions of taxpayer dollars into studying a Yucca Mountain repository.

Additionally, the House rebuffed an amendment to eliminate funding for Department of Energy programs to promote energy efficiency and renewable energy.

## **House rejects bids to abandon nuclear waste site at Yucca Mountain**

The Hill

July 10, 2014

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The House on Thursday defeated two proposals to prevent development of the Yucca Mountain nuclear waste repository in Nevada.

Rep. Dina Titus (D-Nev.) offered two amendments to the fiscal 2015

Energy-Water appropriations bill to block the potential facility.

One of her amendments, rejected 96-326, would have stricken a section of the bill preventing the use of funds to "irrevocably remove the possibility that Yucca Mountain may be a repository option in the future."

Titus urged fellow lawmakers to block construction of a nuclear repository in her state.

"Nevada is not a wasteland," Titus said.

Rep. Steven Horsford (D-Nev.) said construction of a repository at Yucca Mountain would threaten Nevada's tourism industry.

"People come to Vegas for the bright lights, not for radioactive glow," Horsford said.

But Rep. John Shimkus (R-Ill.) said that the government should continue investing in a nuclear waste repository at Yucca Mountain to avoid wasting previously allocated funds.

"I am not trying to be a jerk. I know it is tough," Shimkus said. "Thirty-two states have put in money to the Nuclear Waste Fund on a promise that the federal government would have a site. Your amendment would say no, we are just going to walk away again."

Rep. Mike Simpson (R-Idaho), the chairman of the House Energy-Water Appropriations subcommittee, argued that the administration had stalled action on Yucca Mountain simply so that President Obama could win Nevada's electoral votes.

"We need to wait for the safety review by the NRC [Nuclear Regulatory Commission] to be done to decide what we are going to do moving forward, instead of political decisions that have been made on Yucca Mountain in the past," Simpson said.

Titus's second amendment, defeated 75-344, would eliminate all \$150 million allocated for nuclear waste disposal and instead divert the funds toward reducing the deficit. Titus said the entire account would ultimately be used toward developing Yucca Mountain.

"The legislation before us directs \$150 million to be spent on 'activities related to the Nuclear Waste Policy Act.' For my constituents in southern Nevada, we know that that is code for 'build the Yucca Mountain nuclear waste repository,'" Titus said.

But Simpson argued it would be wasteful to abandon the study of the Yucca Mountain site.

"We can argue as to whether Yucca Mountain is the right place or not," Simpson said. "It is the most studied piece of earth on this Earth. We know more about it than anywhere else. Yet, for political reasons, we have stopped it, and it will truly be a \$15 billion waste if we don't

proceed."

## **Leaders shared SRS concerns with Energy Secretary**

Aiken Standard

July 9, 2014

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Aiken County Councilman Chuck Smith said Department of Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz engaged in dialogue but did not "show his hand" when asked questions about the MOX facility and other major programs and infrastructure at the Savannah River Site during a recent meeting.

Smith is the vice chair of the Energy Communities Alliance an organization of local governments that are adjacent to or impacted by DOE activities.

The group met in Washington, D.C., on June 23 and attended meetings with Moniz, the Office on Budget and Management and National Nuclear Security Administration officials.

Smith shared concerns about DOE's approach to MOX, the failed Yucca Mountain repository and gave examples from other DOE/National Nuclear Security Administration sites where projects were started then changed, delayed or canceled. The federal government's plans to use Yucca Mountain in Nevada as a waste repository were canceled when funding was cut in 2010. The decision has left several DOE sites holding unwanted waste, including SRS.

He also told officials that DOE's decisions impact jobs and cause economic uncertainty in DOE communities.

He said Moniz acknowledged that DOE needs to exercise more discipline when developing project budgets, but did not make any promises.

"We spoke about the on-and-off approach to MOX and other SRS infrastructure," Smith said. "It was a good conversation, but no promises were made."

Rick McLeod, executive director of the SRS Community Reuse Organization, was also in attendance and sent out a press release that noted several other topics that came up during the meeting.

Another major topic included the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant in Carlsbad, New Mexico. SRS routinely sent waste to the pilot plant until February, when the plant was shut down due to radiation exposure.

According to the press release, Moniz said the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant is still an essential part of the cleanup mission, and he committed to opening it as soon and as safely as possible.

Despite the uncertainties, McLeod said the meeting was encouraging and beneficial for those representing DOE communities.

"All of the DOE communities in the different DOE meetings stressed how important an open dialogue was between DOE and the local community leaders," he said.

## **Germany paying SRS researchers to see how site could handle German waste**

Aiken Standard

July 11, 2104

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COLUMBIA-- U.S. Energy Department officials say the German government is paying researchers at the Savannah River Site near Aiken to study how to handle waste that might be sent to South Carolina.

The research is focused on how to separate materials in the waste.

Gary DeLeon with the Energy Department says if the material is processed, an easier way is needed to handle it. DeLeon says a method has been developed to separate the highly enriched uranium. It could be blended to make fuel for nuclear reactors.

The United States has a longstanding program to bring back nuclear waste created by American-generated atomic material that sent to foreign countries for research.

## **Nuclear site workers test thousands of air samples**

Tri City Herald

July 10, 2014

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RICHLAND, Wash. --About 12,000 air samples taken on the Hanford Nuclear Reservation this year after more than three dozen workers reported being sickened by chemical vapors have failed to find a cause for the problem, Hanford officials said Wednesday.

But Hanford officials said that doesn't mean workers aren't getting sick.

"Our workers are not exposed to vapors, but they are having symptoms," said Tom Fletcher of the U.S. Department of Energy, which manages Hanford. "The question is: 'Why?'"

"This isn't something we are taking lightly," Fletcher said.

None of the 12,000 air samples taken this year showed chemical levels above occupational-exposure limits, Fletcher said. In fact, more than 50,000 air samples dating back to 2007 found no chemical exposure above the allowable limits, he said.

Hanford officials are hoping an investigation being conducted by the Savannah River National Laboratory might shed light on what is causing the illnesses. A draft of that report is due by October.

Hanford for more than four decades made plutonium for nuclear weapons, and it now contains the nation's greatest volume of nuclear waste. Much of the waste is stored in 177 giant underground storage tanks. It is workers at those tanks who are reporting smelling chemical vapors and then falling ill.

This year, 38 workers have sought treatment after reporting exposure to chemical vapors. Some of the workers reported irritation in their eyes, nose or throat, or a metallic taste in their mouth, Hanford officials said during a media briefing on Wednesday.

But all 38 workers were checked by doctors and cleared to return to work, Hanford officials said.

Fletcher demonstrated safety precautions taken by Hanford tank workers, and he showed reporters machines that can detect chemicals in the air.

Bob Wilkinson, an environmental safety manager for contractor Washington River Protection Solutions, said the lack of evidence doesn't mean that workers are not genuinely becoming sick.

"There may be something out there we are not aware of," Wilkinson said. "I do not believe any folks have done false reporting or are psychosomatic. I feel they are real."

The 177 tanks contain a toxic stew of chemical and radioactive wastes, with no two tanks storing the exact same contents. Hanford workers are busy transferring the contents of leaking, older single-walled tanks into newer double-walled tanks.

Irritation of the throat is the most commonly reported symptom, Wilkinson said.

Hanford covers 586 square miles near Richland, Washington, about 200 miles southeast of Seattle. It was created during the Manhattan Project in World War II to make plutonium for nuclear weapons. That work ended in the 1980s, and the site is now engaged in a \$2 billion-a-year cleanup of the resulting wastes.