

**Opening Statement
Congressman Jamie Raskin**

**Hearing on “Examining America’s Nuclear Waste Management and Storage”
Subcommittee for the Interior, Energy and Environment**

September 26, 2017

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this important hearing. I’d like to say first that I’m serving in the stead of our distinguished Ranking Member and my friend and former student, Ms. Plaskett, as she tends to her constituents in the U.S. Virgin Islands who are struggling to recover from a series of devastating hurricanes and flood damage. Our thoughts, prayers, and efforts are with them.

Mr. Chairman, I greatly appreciate the opportunity to discuss an issue on the minds of so many Americans across the country. Nuclear waste storage is a pressing nationwide concern that requires a nationwide solution. There are currently over 70,000 metric tons of spent nuclear fuel in our country and an additional 13,000 metric tons from defense-related activities. This radioactive waste is currently being stored at dozens of deteriorating nuclear storage sites across the country. I believe we can all agree that this is not a viable or safe, long-term solution.

I believe we can also agree that our government owes the American people an effective plan to address our nuclear waste storage problem. And we also owe the American people a plan that allows for nuclear waste to be stored securely, in a manner that does not poison the environment, and presents no public health and safety concerns for local communities.

Questions about the soundness and safety of our current storage regime and facilities are not new. In recent years, we have witnessed several disturbing domestic incidents that have brought into question our ability to safely store this dangerous material in American communities. Internationally, the nuclear disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi plant, caused by an earthquake and a tsunami, is still a vivid and serious reminder of escaped nuclear radiation. Fukushima serves as a warning for what can happen if we do not keep safety at the forefront of every discussion we have about nuclear waste and storage.

That's why it's profoundly troubling that the Trump Administration is moving swiftly to advance the Yucca Mountain facility. The President's proposed budget provides for \$120 million dollars to re-start the licensing for the controversial facility. There are significant reasons why the repository at Yucca Mountain, a site originally selected 30 years ago, has not yet been built. Yucca Mountain is seismically active and faces the possibility of continued and increased volcanic activity. Moreover, the facility comes with a known risk of radioactive waste leaking into the groundwater and contaminating the drinking water of nearby communities. Furthermore, the transportation of nuclear waste to Yucca Mountain would take it through 329 congressional districts and 44 states as well as the District of Columbia, well over two-thirds of this country. Nor have we have fully considered the national security risk involved in transporting and storing this nuclear waste. These significant and alarming concerns cannot be swept under the rug in a mad dash to get Yucca Mountain licensed. All of these environmental, public health and safety, and transportation questions should be thoroughly answered before we determine that Yucca Mountain is the best site for nuclear waste storage.

There are so many difficulties and dangers involved in using Yucca Mountain to store nuclear waste that the Atomic Safety and Licensing Board Panel is considering approximately

300 contingencies. It seems clear we should be considering alternative sites to act as a permanent repository.

Looking forward, whether we are discussing short-term or long-term solutions, we must continue to make the public's safety a paramount priority. This means carefully considering environmental implications of using particular sites. As the people of Texas, Florida, Louisiana, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands and across the Caribbean struggle desperately to recover from record-force hurricanes and incalculable flooding damage, we must take stock of the fact that climate change is dramatically increasing the ferocity of natural disasters. No plan to safely dispose of and store nuclear waste is remotely complete if it does not take into account the change in weather patterns. It is also imperative that the federal government works with state and local governments to develop and implement effective solutions going forward.

I look forward to hearing today from people who are tackling these issues. I view this hearing as a continuation of a crucial national conversation about our nuclear waste storage problem. We're discussing intensely serious issues today that require serious, comprehensive, and safe long-term solutions. The nuclear waste in question will be around a lot longer than any of us – between 100,000 and 1 million years – so we have every reason to think through every possible dimension of the problem.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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