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## Set Up Policy Paper

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# Yucca Mountain Waste Disposal Site Proposal



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## Introduction

Nuclear power has gone a long way in the US from the days of the Manhattan Project of the 1940s. Since its birth, over ninety reactors have been built and scattered across the country, together producing a fifth of the domestic energy consumption. The price for this is paid in nuclear waste, for which the US has no means of secure disposal. This will most likely change with President Trump.

Back in the 1980s the US government codified its obligation to dispose of civilian-made nuclear waste with the Nuclear Waste Policy Act, later amended in 1987 by designating the Yucca Mountains in Nevada as the location for an underground geological disposal site. Congress created a special fund to collect money for the site's construction, but the plan failed. Nevadans were infuriated at becoming the US' dump site for nuclear waste. They fought tooth and nail in court and in Congress to see the Act abolished. Their resistance paid off when President Obama killed the funding for the site, claiming the site was an environmental hazard and thus needed to be closed. In doing so, Obama shut down the US government's only plan for safely disposing nuclear waste, and has failed to fill in the void with an alternative plan.

Trump intends to change the status quo. He introduced a draft bill, H.R. 3053<sup>1</sup>, currently under congressional review. Its purpose is to amend the 1982 Nuclear Waste Policy Act with:

- facilitating the disbursement of funds for removing civilian radioactive waste;
- granting more power and responsibilities to the Department of Energy while also authorizing contracts between the Department and private firms for interim storage or developing a disposal site under the Department's supervision;
- and reopening the controversial Yucca Mountain waste disposal site.

The proposed bill is a continuation of the previous regime initiated with the 1982 Act. As a result, in Congress the battle lines over the Yucca Mountain and the 1982 Act have been drawn anew, and no discussion can be made of the new bill without rehashing wounds opened with the Nuclear Waste Policy Act and its 1987 amendment. The only difference, now, is that currently it looks like Nevada will lack the political capital to kill the bill and end, once and for all, any discussion about a nuclear waste disposal site within their own borders.

= nice and topical case.

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<sup>1</sup> HR 3053 RH. 115-355, Part.1

## **Yucca Mountain Proposal**

The Yucca Mountain disposal site is an underground facility, located deep under the Yucca Mountain Range, about 129km northwest of Las Vegas. It consists of a processing plant which receives shipments of nuclear waste, repackages them into special containers and ships the waste underground into a large network of tunnels and corridors. Initially it was projected to hold 77,000 metric tons of waste, but in 2007<sup>2</sup> the Department of Energy updated its plans to expand the size further.

### **Dispute**

The Yucca Mountain<sup>3</sup> site is criticized due to potential impacts of nuclear waste on the local geology, and can be summed up in the following points: geology, location, space and transportation.

The disposal site is located over the Yucca Mountain Aquifer, whose water supplies the Amargosa Valley (Nevada's primary agricultural site). Given the terrain, there is a high risk that a toxic leakage would contaminate the Aquifer, and therefore the water used by the farmers.

The Yucca Mountain Range is both volcanically and seismically active. Environmentalists contend the geological conditions would make it quite easy, in the event of leakage, for the toxic waste to expand into the surrounding environment.

Environmentalists then contend that transportation of nuclear waste is a major risk. With millions of Americans living around the potential transits, i.e. from Illinois to Nevada, any incident along the road would cause a major nuclear contamination of the nearby area. As such, any chance of an accident during transportation would be extremely severe for whomever is caught in the contamination site.

### **Position and Audience**

I am a lobbyist representing the interests of Exelon, Corp., which owns nuclear plants in Illinois. President Obama's decision to shut down the Yucca Mountain Site, and not provide an

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<sup>2</sup> <http://stateenergyreport.com/2013/05/21/the-problem-with-yucca-mountain/>

<sup>3</sup> [http://ag.nv.gov/Hot\\_Topics/Issue/Yucca/](http://ag.nv.gov/Hot_Topics/Issue/Yucca/)

alternative solution is causing serious problems for my client's operations in Illinois. Exelon does not have a means for disposing of the waste except for storing it in fuel pools and dry cask storages, both temporary solutions to the waste crisis. Those storage facilities, however, are filling up to capacity and there is no way to either expand the storage units or dispose of the waste. If the government doesn't come up with a solution in the next few years, then my client will have to shut their operations down, which will cause a severe economic backlash to Illinois unless an alternative solution is found. Therefore, I am advocating for the reopening of the Yucca Mountain disposal site, which is currently the only legal solution for nuclear waste disposal.

The policy paper will be directed to Sen. Tammy Duckworth of Illinois, Illinois' representative in the House of Senate. The draft bill, H.R. 3053, currently awaiting approval in the Senate would grant the funding and reopen the Yucca Mountain Site for business.

I expect this policy paper will convince her that the bill needs to be passed, less the Illinois economy suffer a substantial economic loss in the long term, which the state cannot afford to let happen.

= very nice set-up; relevant case, believable actors and issue.

## References

- HR 3053 RH. 115-355, Part.1
- <http://stateenergyreport.com/2013/05/21/the-problem-with-yucca-mountain/>
- [http://ag.nv.gov/Hot\\_Topics/Issue/Yucca/](http://ag.nv.gov/Hot_Topics/Issue/Yucca/)