
House Energy & Commerce Committee


Ranking Member

Republicans

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Barton, Walden Ask DOE Secretary Chu To Explain Plans to Shut Down Yucca

WASHINGTON – U.S. Reps. Joe Barton, R-Texas, and Greg Walden, R-Ore., today asked Department of Energy Secretary Steven Chu to answer questions about an internal department memo that indicates DOE is planning to halt all Yucca Mountain licensing activities in December 2009.

“Secretary Chu could set back the U.S. nuclear waste disposal program for decades, cost U.S. taxpayers potentially billions of dollars, and unfortunately be the most significant decision of his tenure,” said Barton, ranking member of the House Energy and Commerce Committee. “Before Secretary Chu unilaterally shuts down the Yucca Mountain program, perhaps he should explain why, something lacking from any of his public comments to date on the nuclear waste site.”

By shutting down the Yucca Mountain repository, the Obama administration would strand more than \$6 billion of public investment; abandon 25 years of scientific and engineering work; ensure that spent nuclear fuel will remain indefinitely at 121 sites in 39 states, including major metropolitan areas; and undermine the development of nuclear power in the United States.

“We’re asking Secretary Chu and the administration why it’s a good investment for the American people to abandon decades of work and billions of taxpayer dollars to shut down the important energy technology development at Yucca Mountain,” said Walden, ranking member of the committee's Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee. “At a time when the country is trying to break its addiction to foreign oil and increase its dependence on domestically produced energy, this seems like a step backwards.”

“Just this year, DOE sought and was appropriated funding for FY 2010 to continue with licensing support through September 2010 and otherwise has represented to Congress, as recently as September 30, 2009, that it will ‘continue participation in the NRC application process’ for Yucca Mountain, ‘consistent with the provisions of the Nuclear Waste Policy Act,’” the lawmakers wrote. However, “in contrast to these public positions and statements to committees of jurisdiction, your agency’s draft Program Decision Memorandum of October 23, 2009, states that ‘All license defense activities will be terminated in December 2009.’”

“This document raises serious questions about your adherence to statutory obligations and responsibilities under the Nuclear Waste Policy Act and about whether you are taking actions that will increase the department’s or taxpayer liabilities and permanently strand billions of dollars in federal funding and investment in the project,” Barton and Walden added.

Among the questions asked of Chu by the lawmakers:

1. What are your plans with regard to DOE’s pending license application for authorization to construct and operate the Yucca Mountain repository application, including, but not limited to, your plans for support in FY2011 and beyond?
 - a. Provide all documents relating to plans and decisions concerning support for the Yucca Mountain repository application pending before the NRC.
2. What are your plans concerning site remediation, workforce transition, and archiving of data associated with the Yucca Mountain repository program?
3. To the extent you plan to perform site remediation, workforce transition, and archiving of data associated with Yucca Mountain repository program, (i) when did you initiate this decision-making process, (ii) what DOE offices and entities and other federal agencies participated in this decision-making process, and (iii) how will any such action affect DOE’s ability to provide the technical support necessary for the license application pending before the NRC?
 - a. Provide all documents relating to plans concerning site remediation, worker transition, and archiving of data associated with the Yucca Mountain repository program.
4. To the extent you plan to modify or suspend the license application currently pending before the NRC, what is the scientific or technical basis, if any, for this planned action?

- a. Provide all documents relating to technical or scientific basis for modifying or suspending the NRC application.
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5. How do plans concerning site remediation, worker transition, and archiving of data associated with the Yucca Mountain program comport with DOE's statutory obligations under the Nuclear Waste Policy Act of 1982, as amended?
 - a. Provide all documents prepared by DOE that address or analyze how such actions would comport with DOE's statutory obligations under the Nuclear Waste Policy Act of 1982, as amended.
 - b. Provide all documents that address or analyze the potential impact that failing to pursue the Yucca Mountain repository may have on the construction of new nuclear plants.
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6. Provide all documents relating to Congressional requests over the past year for information and documents concerning your policies and plans concerning the Yucca Mountain repository.

A copy of the letter can be found [here](#).

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