

# Put Yucca Mountain to work. The nation needs it.

By Editorial Board July 15

ENERGY SECRETARY Rick Perry traveled to Capitol Hill last month, asking Congress for \$28 billion in funding for everything from nuclear weapons to clean-coal research. Yet one of the most controversial elements in his department's budget proposal was a request for a relatively tiny \$120 million — to restart work on Nevada's Yucca Mountain nuclear waste storage site.

Congress decided in the 1980s that Yucca was to be the permanent home of the country's large and increasing pile of spent nuclear fuel. In a forbidding desert landscape about 100 miles outside Las Vegas, the site would appear to be an ideal choice for an unbreachable underground vault. The federal government spent more than \$15 billion studying the place. Just a couple of years ago, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission found that the facility would be technically sound, considering everything from seismic activity to accidental human intrusion, on time scales of up to a million years. Locals in Nye County, which would stand to benefit from employment related to the site, are on board.

But practically everyone else in Nevada opposes the Yucca project, and state leaders have waged a so-far successful not-in-my-back-yard campaign, even though federal law is clear that the site is to be the nation's nuclear waste storehouse. The state has denied the Energy Department the water rights it would need to build the depository. For years, then-Senate Majority Leader Harry M. Reid (D-Nev.) successfully blocked funding for its development, with the help of President Barack Obama, who made an exception for swing-state Nevada from his pledge to run a science-based administration.

With Mr. Reid and Mr. Obama both retired, the Trump administration and GOP leaders are trying to revive the project. Work is furthest along in the House, where a bill jump-starting Yucca's approval is advancing quickly. Yet it faces a tough road: Nevada's congressional delegation will fight it tooth-and-nail.

It's past time the opposition was sidelined for good. The nation's nuclear regulators have found that technical hurdles can be overcome; the biggest barriers to developing the site are political. Congress should re-fund Yucca Mountain and finally end this gratuitous fight.

But that is hardly all lawmakers need to do. No matter what happens with Yucca, the country should move its stocks of waste, which have piled up at nuclear plants, to interim storage sites, where they will be secured more safely and cheaply while the permanent depository is permitted and constructed. With the messy Yucca process in mind, an Obama-era blue-ribbon

commission on nuclear waste recommended enticing localities to volunteer to host waste sites with the significant economic benefits that such facilities can bring to isolated communities. Though perhaps few places would volunteer, a cooperative approach could result in a smoother process and is worth a try. Congress has considered legislation along these lines before. It should do so again.

The nation's nuclear power plants generate massive amounts of electricity with practically no carbon dioxide emissions. Answer the waste question, and the technology will look all the more valuable.

Questions from *Put Yucca Mountain to work. The nation needs it.*

1. What was the purpose of the Yucca Mountain project started in the 1980s?
2. How much has the federal government already spent developing this project?
3. EXPLAIN the controversy surrounding Yucca Mt.
4. Where is all of the nation's nuclear waste currently stored?

Explain HOW it is stored. (might require research)

5. Where (close to us in Cary, NC) is this happening?
6. What is one benefit to nuclear energy?
7. What are TWO drawbacks to nuclear energy?