

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 13, 2018

The Honorable Lamar Alexander
Chairman
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on
Energy and Water Development
142 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on
Energy and Water Development
142 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Feinstein:

I write today to reiterate my steadfast opposition to the Administration's efforts to restart licensing activities at Yucca Mountain given the unreasonable costs and the unresolved safety concerns. Despite Congress' repeated refusal to pass a law funding the high-level nuclear waste repository, including in the recently enacted fiscal year (FY) 2018 omnibus spending bill, the Administration's FY 2019 budget includes a request for \$120 million for the Department of Energy (DOE) to revive this ill-conceived and fiscally irresponsible plan. This request perpetuates a long-standing fight over states' rights and distracts us from the real task at hand, which is finding a viable long-term nuclear waste storage solution that meets the needs of the American people. I firmly believe that our nation cannot make any progress toward finding a viable long-term storage solution without first moving past Yucca Mountain.

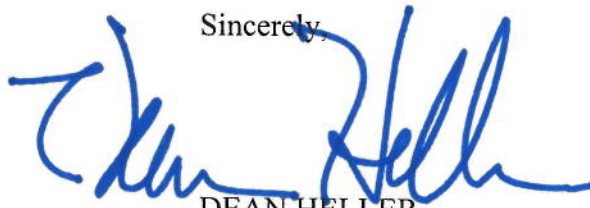
Chairman Alexander and Ranking Member Feinstein, I want to commend you that the flawed Yucca Mountain proposal has not been funded previously under your leadership. As we all know, the true cost of the Administration's request is not \$120 million, but rather hundreds of billions of dollars. On numerous occasions, Governor Sandoval has made clear the State of Nevada will challenge more than 200 elements of any license application, which will take countless years to resolve and cost the federal government billions of dollars. These costs come in addition to an additional \$82 billion that would be needed to license, construct, and operate Yucca Mountain through closure, according to DOE estimates. Given that nearly \$15 billion has already been spent on the repository, the total system life cycle cost for the project is estimated to be around \$97 billion, an amount that would likely be 15 to 20 percent higher in today's dollars.

In stark contrast to this Administration's fiscally irresponsible request, we do have cheaper and better options. The State of Nevada's Agency for Nuclear Projects has already demonstrated that there are substantial economic benefits to be realized by developing a repository at other, less complex and problematic sites like salt mines. These sites do not require the extraordinary and expensive engineered barriers that Yucca Mountain does. As a result, findings indicate that the estimated cost of a generic salt repository is between \$24 and \$39 million. Given the tremendous taxpayer savings that could be realized, I believe it is simply commonsense to devote further study to the use of these more cost effective sites.

Beyond the unreasonable costs associated with the Yucca Mountain proposal, significant work remains to be done to ensure full and fair resolution of the thousands of stakeholder concerns related to the opening of the site. For example, procedural safeguards, like local hearings and local adjudication, must be put in place to guarantee affected parties receive the process they are due. In addition, basic safety and security measures, as recommended by the National Academy of Sciences and the Blue Ribbon Commission, must be considered and implemented to ensure the risk of radiological hazards and severe accidents does not go unmitigated. I will continue to work with DOE on these and other issues to ensure that if the Yucca Mountain proposal moves forward over the objections of Nevadans and Nevada, basic procedural and safety measures are not also forgotten.

Because of these unresolved cost and safety concerns, I continue to stand with the State of Nevada in its staunch opposition to any effort to restart the repository licensing process. I strongly urge you not to fund the Administration's request, and I once again encourage you to devote resources toward DOE's consent-based siting initiative for the storage and disposal of high-level nuclear waste. Thank you for your timely attention to this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Dean Heller", is written over the word "Sincerely,".

DEAN HELLER
U.S. Senator