

Opening Statement
Chairman Paul D. Tonko
Subcommittee on Environment and Climate Change
Committee on Energy and Commerce
Hearing on “Cleaning Up Communities: Ensuring Safe Storage and Disposal of Spent
Nuclear Fuel”
June 13, 2019

The Subcommittee on Environment and Climate Change will now come to order. I recognize myself for 5 minutes for the purposes of an opening statement.

The politics of nuclear waste disposal are unquestionably difficult.

In 1982, Congress passed the Nuclear Waste Policy Act directing the Department of Energy to remove spent nuclear fuel from commercial nuclear power plants in exchange for certain fees, and transport it to a permanent geologic repository beginning no later than January 31, 1998.

1998 has come and gone, and year after year we continue to debate how Congress can help break the impasse in which we currently find ourselves.

Today, there are over 70,000 metric tons of waste, which is expected to grow significantly in the decades to come. We are also dealing with more and more reactors shutting down, many of which are decommissioning early.

I take our nation’s nuclear waste challenges seriously.

Today there is not an easy or clear solution.

But while we fail to make progress, American taxpayers continue to make payments from Treasury’s Judgment Fund.

There are many Members on this Committee, on both sides of the aisle, that would like to see a fair outcome that acknowledges these challenges, finds workable solutions, and protects American taxpayers.

And I want to give credit to Mr. Shimkus for his tireless efforts on this issue. I appreciate his commitment to helping communities dealing with waste and seeking to protect taxpayers from future need to make payments from the Treasury.

Today, the Subcommittee will consider three bills which take different steps to address our nation’s nuclear waste issues.

H.R. 2699, the Nuclear Waste Policy Amendments Act of 2019, introduced by Mr. McNerney and Mr. Shimkus, is very similar to H.R. 3053 from the 115th Congress, which passed this Committee and the House with bipartisan support. The bill makes a number of updates to the Nuclear Waste Policy Act.

H.R. 3136, the STORE Nuclear Fuel Act of 2019, introduced by Ms. Matsui, directs the

Secretary of Energy to establish an interim storage program.

And finally H.R. 2995, the Spent Fuel Prioritization Act of 2019, introduced by Congressman Mike Levin, would require the Secretary of Energy to prioritize the removal of spent nuclear fuel from decommissioned nuclear sites in areas with large populations and high seismic hazard.

I doubt any piece of legislation alone will solve our waste challenges, but I do believe we need to be considering all options for disposal in an effort to find the safest and most cost-effective way to move forward.

Today's panel attempts to cover many different and critical perspectives, and I look forward to the discussion. With that, I yield the remainder of my time to Mr. McNerney.