

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND REFORM

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

MAJORITY (202) 225-5051

MINORITY (202) 225-5074

<http://oversight.house.gov>

### Opening Statement

#### Subcommittee Chairman Harley Rouda

#### Hearing on “Examining America’s Nuclear Waste Management, Storage, and the Need for Solutions”

#### Subcommittee on Environment

#### June 7, 2019

Good afternoon. I am proud to bring a bit of DC to Orange County today, as we convene this hearing in Laguna Niguel to examine the management and storage of our nation’s nuclear waste and the need for Congress to take action to find a long-term solution.

Questions related to the long-term safety of America’s storage of nuclear waste are not new. The first commercial nuclear power plant in the United States was opened by President Dwight Eisenhower in 1958. 25 years later, President Ronald Reagan signed into law the Nuclear Waste Policy Act of 1982, which dictated that the federal government would identify a permanent geological repository and begin transferring waste from nuclear power plants by 1998.

As we sit here today, it has been over two decades since that 1998 deadline - and *over 50 years* since the opening of this nation’s first nuclear power plant - and the federal government has failed, and continues to fail, to find a solution to our country’s nuclear waste problem.

Without a permanent repository, there are now approximately 100 sites across at least 34 states currently storing high-level nuclear waste. Americans’ exposure to these risks associated with having nuclear waste in our communities does not fall along any partisan or demographic lines. Approximately one in every three Americans now live within 50 miles of nuclear waste. Nuclear reactors and spent nuclear fuel sites sit in congressional districts represented by both Democrats and Republicans. The serious challenges at hand affect communities across the country.

One of these sites, the San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station (SONGS), is less than *20 miles* from where we are right now.

Let’s put that in to context - after the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster in 2011, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) recommended that Americans in Japan evacuate 50 miles away from the site. Currently, an estimated *8.4 million* people live within a 50-mile radius of the SONGS plant – within this radius are residents of Los Angeles, San Diego, Orange Riverside, San Bernardino counties.

As a resident of Laguna Beach, my family and I live just 30 miles from the SONGS site. I hear the concerns of my constituents and those of Southern Californians – I, too, am concerned about the long-term risk associated with storing 3.6 million pounds of nuclear waste at SONGS. This nuclear waste is just about 100 feet from the shoreline, sits adjacent to one of the nation’s busiest highways, and near to seismic fault lines.

Since the promise fueled by the first wave of nuclear reactors in the 1950s, we have seen highly publicized meltdowns at Three Mile Island and Chernobyl and waste management challenges around the globe – it is clear that nuclear power and waste are not without significant risk.

Commercial nuclear power production in the United States has created over 160 million pounds of spent nuclear fuel and an additional 28 million pounds of nuclear waste has been created by nuclear weapons production and other defense-related activities. And it is estimated we will be adding another 120 million pounds in the next several decades – that will be a total of 280 million pounds of nuclear waste with no home and risking the homes and lives of over 100 million Americans.

As Chairman of this Subcommittee, the protection of public health and safety are among my top priorities. I am committed to focusing the federal government's attention on its obligation to protect the public from nuclear hazards, to serve as an advocate for the environment, and to work to hold the appropriate agencies accountable.

If we take steps now to fully recognize the magnitude of our country's nuclear waste problem, and, if we reach across the aisle to develop bipartisan legislation, the United States can pursue workable solutions. But we do not have any more time to waste - the clock is ticking. In fact, because of the challenges and logistics involved with moving and housing nuclear waste with a long-term viable solution, the best-case scenarios, if we act now with purpose and expediency, is approximately 10 years out.

My hope is that we can all agree that our current and past failed efforts to both develop *and* implement a plan has not led to a viable or safe, long-term solution. Our government owes the American people an effective plan to address our nuclear waste storage problem – a plan that securely stores this waste without presenting health and safety concerns for local communities across the country.

The radioactive material at the core of this challenge will outlast everyone in the room and all humans currently alive. It's estimated that all of our nation's nuclear waste will remain radioactive for somewhere between 100,000 and 1 million years.

I hope that my statements adequately portray the seriousness of this dilemma. My thoughts and feelings are informed by the fact that our action or inaction will have a direct impact on the lives of our children, grandchildren, and hundreds of future generations.

I thank you all for joining us today, and I appreciate all of our witnesses for both their ongoing work on this important issue and for taking the time to join us today – I know that many of you have traveled considerable distances to be here and have prepared thoughtful testimony to share.

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Contact: Aryele Bradford, Communications Director, (202) 226-5181.