



**Opening Statement**  
**Hearing on Nuclear Waste and the Nuclear Waste Administration Act**  
**Chairman Lisa Murkowski**  
**June 27, 2019**

Good morning, everyone. The committee will come to order as we meet to examine an issue that effectively we've been at a stalemate for quite some time – what we should do with the used nuclear fuel that is accumulating at our nation's nuclear reactors.

As a starting point, I think we should recognize that nuclear energy is an important part of our country's electric generation mix. I believe it is a vital part of our mix. The large reactors that dot the landscape provide reliable, emissions-free power to communities across our country. Our nation's nuclear industry is critically important, but it also faces a number of challenges, and one that has impacted it since the first reactors began operation is nuclear waste disposition.

Beginning with the passage of the Nuclear Waste Policy Act in 1982, Congress has attempted several times to address the back-end of the fuel cycle. In an effort to resolve an earlier stalemate, the federal government was supposed to begin taking title to used fuel and moving it to a repository – at Yucca Mountain in Nevada – beginning in 1998. The federal government's failure to deliver on this promise is now costing taxpayers up to \$2 million per day.

This hearing is an opportunity for us to consider our next steps on nuclear waste. Do we continue to delay in the face of the stalemate over Yucca, or do we try to find another path forward for used fuel storage – especially for communities that are maintaining sites with only used fuel casks left on hand, with the rest of the plant decommissioned?

In 2010, then-Secretary of Energy Steven Chu convened the Blue Ribbon Commission on America's Nuclear Future to conduct a comprehensive review of policies for managing the back-end of the fuel cycle. The Commission's report included a number of recommendations and led to the introduction of the Nuclear Waste Administration Act.

Over the years, this legislation has been led by a number of members, including Senators Wyden, Senator Alexander, both on this committee. I have been a sponsor of the legislation all along with Senators Alexander and Senator Feinstein, my partners on the Energy and Water Appropriations Subcommittee, for multiple Congresses, now. So we've been at this for a while and I think it is probably fair to say we'd like to put something behind us at some point in time here sooner rather than later.

Our legislation aims to move the process forward so that we can finally move used fuel to a permanent repository. Our bill creates a Nuclear Waste Administration to oversee consent-based siting for interim storage and an additional repository that could be located in states and communities that want it. Our bill also prioritizes the removal of orphaned used fuel at decommissioned reactor sites for temporary storage at consolidated sites.

Our bill is S. 1234 in this new Congress, I wish it was as easy as one two three four. We know it requires some updates and that there are a number of ideas to improve specific sections. So I welcome those and I look forward to hearing testimony from our distinguished panel this morning and I also welcome thoughts and comments from other members.

Ultimately, I hope we can all agree that is long past time to figure this out – and the sooner we find a path forward, the better.

It has been six years now since I and other first cosponsored this legislation, and we are in the same place, we are effectively in the same place when it comes to the back-end of the fuel cycle as when we introduced that legislation six years ago. But, in that time, we have seen tremendous progress in the area of nuclear with our advanced nuclear reactors. The United States has the ability to lead the world on those technologies, but without a solution on nuclear waste, I believe we are less likely to realize our full potential.

We're here today to start – or perhaps better said, restart – the conversation. I know that Chairman Barrasso has a bill on nuclear waste in his EPW Committee that he is keen to move forward on it I'm glad we are seeing renewed interest across Congress to address this challenge. It is a good thing that we have multiple options on the table. I think that is a positive development and I sincerely hope that we can move forward in this Congress, so that we can all move forward on nuclear waste after decades of inaction.

Ranking Member Manchin?

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