

## **Congress Needs to Pass the Nuclear Waste Funding Bill**

By Lauren “Bubba” McDonald

It was with great disappointment that I read that two of our Georgia Representatives in the U.S. House voted against H.R. 3053 on May 10. This bill amends the Nuclear Waste Policy Act (NWPA) of 1982 to direct the Department of Energy (DOE) to initiate a program to consolidate and temporarily store commercial spent nuclear fuel during the development, construction, and operation of a permanent nuclear waste repository. Representatives John Lewis and Hank Johnson voted no to move forward on the more than \$1.3 billion Georgia ratepayers have paid into the Nuclear Waste Depository Fund since 1982. The history of the NWPA is littered with the broken promises of the federal government which this law requires to provide for a site to store nuclear waste from the nation’s nuclear power generating plants. The federal government was supposed to begin accepting nuclear waste at Yucca Mountain in 1998. Instead, the Obama Administration effectively killed the program in 2011.

It is high time that the federal government live up to its promises under the NWPA. Although Georgia electric ratepayers stopped paying into the fund in 2016, thanks to action by the courts and this Commission, ratepayers across the nation have sent more than \$40 billion to the federal treasury. Under the Nuclear Waste Policy Act (NWPA), the federal government, through the Department of Energy (DOE), is responsible for permanently disposing of the nation’s nuclear waste in a geologic repository at Yucca Mountain, Nevada. H.R. 3053 would not change that fundamental requirement, but would temporarily limit DOE’s authority to collect certain fees charged to utilities with nuclear plants to cover the costs of disposing of the waste they generate and would authorize DOE to enter into agreements to provide benefits to state, local, and tribal governments that might host or be affected by facilities related to the waste management program.

DOE may enter into agreements to provide benefits to state, local, and Tribal governments that might host or be affected by facilities related to storing nuclear waste.

The bill revises the method by which DOE funds its nuclear waste management activities through the collection and usage of the Nuclear Waste Fund.

I am appreciative that the majority of our U.S. House delegation, 12 members in fact, voted in favor of advancing funding for the Yucca Mountain Depository in the state of Nevada, including all the Republicans and two Democrats. The measure is now in the hands of the Senate where opponents have vowed to kill it. I call on all Georgians to contact your Senators, Johnny Isakson and David Perdue, and urge them to pressure their colleagues to give this measure a vote.

As a member of the Nuclear Waste Subcommittee of the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners, I have more than a fleeting interest in this topic. We have four nuclear plant units in Georgia and two more under construction.

It is well past the time that the federal government lived up to its promise made more than 34 years ago.

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