



Committee: Senate Environment & Public Works Committee
Event: [Hearing to Examine Updating America's Nuclear Waste Management Policy](#)
Date: September 23, 2026

Executive Summary:

On September 23, 2026, the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee held a hearing to examine strategies for updating the nation's nuclear waste management policy. Members across both parties agreed that resolving the stalemate over spent nuclear fuel is essential to support the deployment of advanced nuclear energy and meet rising electricity demand.

Republicans emphasized that the Department of Energy's (DOE) Nuclear Lifecycle Innovation Campus (NLIC) initiative, which relies on federal-state partnership models, offers a viable path forward for co-locating nuclear fuel recycling and permanent disposal. They also stressed the need to reform the Nuclear Waste Fund to unlock billions in stranded ratepayer capital. Democrats expressed support for finding a durable waste solution but stressed that any consent-based siting strategy must include strict community engagement. They defended the independence of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) and raised concerns regarding the nuclear proliferation risks associated with fuel reprocessing.

Member Toplines:

[Full Committee Chair Shelley Moore Capito \(R-WV\)](#): Capito discussed the administration's proposed NLICs, which would co-locate nuclear and related industrial facilities and involve agreements with host states concerning nuclear waste disposal. She highlighted the need for durable federal-state agreements, clear responsibilities and enforcement mechanisms, safety standards and NRC oversight, and a sustainable funding structure for nuclear waste disposal. Capito also noted that ratepayers have contributed more than \$50 billion to the federal Nuclear Waste Fund, while federal funding has not fully covered the costs associated with the nuclear waste program.

*Sen. Angela Alsobrooks (D-MD)*¹: Alsobrooks spoke on behalf of Full Committee Ranking Member Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI). She argued that while nuclear fuel reprocessing can reduce waste volume, it cannot fully eliminate the need for permanent disposal. Alsobrooks emphasized that the legitimacy of America's nuclear industry relies on NRC independence and cautioned the administration to not restrict the agency's autonomy.

Witness Toplines:

[Lake Barrett, Chair, American Nuclear Society's Nuclear Waste Policy Task Force](#): Barrett expressed support for the NLIC initiative, recommending that Congress enable DOE to develop durable business agreements with host states. He acknowledged that a multi-state campus

¹ Opening statement not available at the time of this memo's distribution.

system will be more complex and expensive than the original Yucca Mountain plan, but argued it is achievable. Barrett added that the U.S. must balance technical solutions for waste management with a strategy that respects state authority.

[Katrina McMurrian, Executive Director, Nuclear Waste Strategy Coalition:](#) McMurrian urged Congress to reestablish an integrated nuclear waste disposal program and directed DOE to create an internal office dedicated solely to waste disposal. She called for reforming the budgetary treatment of the Nuclear Waste Fund to ensure continued access to its \$51 billion balance. McMurrian noted that while recycling spent nuclear fuel is important, a permanent geologic repository remains foundational to any waste strategy.

[Kathryn Huff, Professor and Department Chair, Department of Nuclear Engineering, University of Wisconsin Madison:](#) Huff testified that consent-based siting conversations revealed communities are more willing to host interim storage if it is tied to research and economic activity, validating the NLIC concept. She stressed that commercial-scale civilian reprocessing will require strong federal support and continued NRC autonomy.

Major Takeaways:

NLIC and State Partnerships:

- Capito highlighted the NLIC model as a way to co-locate nuclear supply chain facilities with waste disposal, noting DOE has signed MOUs with six states.
- Sen. **John Curtis** (R-UT) expressed cautious optimism for Utah's participation, but demanded federal accountability to ensure states are not left with stranded waste if pilot programs fail.
- Sen. **Cynthia Lummis** (R-WY) noted that states accustomed to coal, oil, gas, uranium, and nuclear development are well-positioned to host the NLICs.

Nuclear Waste Fund Reform and Taxpayer Liability:

- Capito argued that Congress's failure to adequately appropriate the Nuclear Waste Fund was the primary reason the *Nuclear Waste Policy Act* failed to achieve its goals.
- Capito pressed witnesses on whether the current Nuclear Waste Fund structure should be continued with additional guardrails, or whether a new funding mechanism is needed to ensure predictable and adequate resources for a future disposal program.

Nuclear Regulatory Independence and Safety

- Alsobrooks argued that the legitimacy of the U.S. nuclear industry depends on NRC independence, and raised concerns about efforts to undermine the agency's autonomy and staff retention.
- Sen. **Ed Markey** (D-MA) criticized the Trump administration for firing the NRC chair and dismissing members of the Nuclear Waste Technical Review Board, arguing these actions undermine public trust in the safety of waste management.

Nuclear Fuel Recycling and Proliferation Risk

- Sen. **Jon Husted** (R-OH) promoted recycling as a solution to both waste management and baseload power demand, urging passage of his Nuclear REFUEL Act ([S.2082](#)) and

arguing that private investment will follow if Congress gets the regulatory framework right.

- Markey pressed witnesses on the nuclear proliferation risks of reprocessing facilities, warning that enriched uranium or plutonium represents the missing ingredient for a nuclear weapon and any campus plan must include intense security measures.

Consent-Based Siting and Community Engagement

- Markey emphasized that any interim or permanent storage facility must secure explicit local buy-in to avoid repeating the failures of Yucca Mountain, noting that communities have been forced to host waste for decades longer than they planned.
- Markey also criticized the NLIC initiative for lacking detail on how host communities, not just state governments, will be engaged in planning and decision-making.

Nuclear Waste Transportation

- Sen. **Lisa Blunt Rochester** (D-DE) pressed witnesses on what measures must be considered for moving spent fuel from current storage sites to consolidated or permanent facilities, and whether transportation infrastructure issues can be addressed simultaneously with siting.