For Immediate Release

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CAPITOL HILL, WASHINGTON, DC, June 28 2017 —“Yesterday, Beyond Nuclear joined a coalition of 50 national, regional, and local grassroots environmental groups, in a letter calling on members of the U.S. House Energy & Commerce Committee to oppose H.R. 3053, the Nuclear Waste Policy Amendments Act of 2017, as dangerously misguided. This letter is part of a decades-long campaign, by over a thousand environmental groups from all 50 states, in opposition to the Yucca Mountain, Nevada high-level radioactive waste dump scheme. This environmental coalition remains as vigilant and determined as ever.

“Yucca Mountain has repeatedly failed the test to serve as a high-level radioactive waste burial dump for the past several decades, and still does.

“First and foremost, Yucca Mountain is located on Western Shoshone Indian land, as recognized by the United States government when it signed the ‘peace and friendship’ Treaty of Ruby Valley in 1863. Thus, the Yucca dump scheme is illegal and unconstitutional. Treaties are the highest law of the land, equal in stature to the Constitution itself. It would be like the U.S. trying to force the burial of its radioactive wastes onto Canada or Mexico, against their sovereign will. As with nuclear weapons testing at the adjacent Nevada Test Site, the Western Shoshone have made clear for decades, they do not consent to this dump on their land.

“In fact, the Native Community Action Council (NCAC) has achieved official party status by establishing standing in the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission’s licensing proceeding for the Yucca dump. NCAC’s contentions assert that the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) does not hold title to the land or water at Yucca Mountain. This belongs to the Western Shoshone Indian Nation.

“In addition, the Yucca dump would be an environmental injustice, and radioactive racism. The Downwinders of Nevada and Utah, and beyond – Western Shoshones, Southern Paiutes, and Native Americans of other First Nations, as well as cowboys, ranchers, Mormons, etc., which an official of the DOE’s predecessor, the Atomic Energy Commission, once infamously referred to as an expendable “low-use segment of the population” – have already suffered more than enough from hazardous nuclear weapons testing radioactive fallout. Targeting the same people of color and low-income
communities for the country’s high-level radioactive waste dump adds insult to injury, and would inflict yet more injury.

“Yucca also happens to be entirely unsuitable scientifically. The area is seismically unstable, and potentially volcanically active. The combination of underground water saturation, rock chemistry, and the waste’s thermal heat would create the perfect storm, corroding burial containers and releasing hazardous radioactive waste into groundwater in a relatively short matter of time. Farmers, ranchers, and families downstream with drinking and irrigation water wells would be exposed to hazardous radioactive contamination, as would the Timbisha Band of Shoshone Indians further downstream in Death Valley, California, where Yucca’s groundwater surfaces as springs.

“Last but not least, if the unacceptable dump at Yucca were to be opened, it would launch shipments of highly radioactive irradiated nuclear fuel onto the roads, rails, and waterways of 44 states and the District of Columbia, through many major cities, through 370 U.S. congressional districts nationwide, and past the homes of tens of millions of Americans. These ‘Mobile Chernobyl’ train-, ‘Dirty Bomb on Wheels’ truck-, and ‘Floating Fukushima’ barge-risks show how insensitive Rep. Shimkus is. After all, he scheduled the ‘Discussion Draft’ subcommittee hearing that unveiled this bill, on the very day – April 26, 2017 -- marking 31 years since the beginning of the ongoing Chernobyl nuclear catastrophe in Ukraine (Cesium-137 contamination over vast regions of the former Soviet Union and Europe, for example, will remain hazardous for at least 300 years).

“In addition to the Yucca Mountain, Nevada-bound shipments Shimkus’s H.R. 3053 would launch, it would initiate shipments to so-called centralized interim storage facilities even sooner. The top targets, at Waste Control Specialists in Andrews County, west Texas, and Eddy-Lea [Counties] Energy Alliance in southeastern New Mexico – within less than 40 miles of each other – risk becoming de facto permanent, surface parking lot dumps.

“Alarmingly, when I testified before the subcommittee he chairs on October 1, 2015, Rep. Shimkus not only did not know about the potential irradiated nuclear fuel railway shipping routes located deep in the heart of downtown Chicago, just a quarter-mile from the Art Institute, but he then claimed my assertion was incorrect. Unfortunately, I am not mistaken. In addition, he attempted to rebut my concerns about the risk of TOW anti-tank missile attack against shipping containers, as by terrorists, by claiming TOWs are difficult to fire, and could not hit a moving container. TOWs were designed to hit Soviet tanks that can travel faster than 35 miles per hour. Of course, shipping containers do slow to 35 mph or less, such as while traveling through a city like Chicago. Containers could also be sitting still, such as in a train yard deep in the heart of downtown Chicago.

“The unsuitable, failed Yucca dump scheme has long served as the illusion of a solution for our high-level radioactive waste dilemma. We should stop making it, by permanently shutting down atomic reactors as soon as possible, and replacing their electricity supply with energy efficiency and renewable sources such as wind and solar.
“For the 80,000 metric tons of commercial irradiated nuclear fuel that already exists in the U.S., Hardened On-Site Storage (HOSS) should be implemented, as close to the point of generation as possible, as safely as possible. Many hundreds of environmental groups, representing all 50 states, have been advocating HOSS since 2002, when Congress unwisely overrode Nevada’s veto against the Yucca dump in the first place.

“Making all this so much worse is the simultaneous confirmation, by the U.S. Senate, of three pro-nuclear industry Nuclear Regulatory Commissioners, for five year terms, who are entirely biased in favor of approving the Yucca dump, and likely similarly in favor of rubber-stamping parking lot dumps.

“NRC Chairman Kristine Svinicki concealed her past work at the DOE on the Yucca dump during her prior NRC Commission confirmation hearing, and also worked as a top staffer for pro-Yucca dump U.S. Senator Larry Craig (R-ID).

“Annie Caputo has worked as a top nuclear power industry lobbyist, as well as a top staffer for such pro-Yucca dump U.S. Senate Environment and Public Works Committee chairmen as James Inhofe (R-OK) and John Barasso (R-WY), as well as U.S. House Energy and Commerce Committee chairman Fred Upton (R-MI).

“David Wright, former chairman of the South Carolina Public Service Commission and former president of the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners (NARUC), also has a major conflict of interest.

“Governmental institutions in South Carolina, as well as NARUC itself, have for many years filed multiple lawsuits in pursuit of pressuring for the opening of the Yucca dump ASAP. Why is it that NRC Commissioner, and later agency chairman, Greg Jaczko was required to recuse himself from Yucca-related matters for two years, while these blatantly pro-Yucca dump NRC Commissioners are not required to do so?

“The Japanese Parliament concluded, after a year-long independent investigation into the Fukushima nuclear catastrophe, that the root cause was collusion, between regulator, industry, and government officials. That was the reason the three reactors that melted down were so very vulnerable to the natural disasters that struck on 3/11/11. But we have such dangerous collusion here, as seen on the Yucca dump, parking lot dump, and Mobile Chernobyl issues. Such collusion, between NRC, industry, and Congress, risks radioactive catastrophe here, down the road.”

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Beyond Nuclear aims to educate and activate the public about the connections between nuclear power and nuclear weapons and the need to abandon both to safeguard our future. Beyond Nuclear advocates for an energy future that is sustainable, benign and democratic. The Beyond Nuclear team works with diverse partners and allies to provide the public, government officials, and the media with the critical information necessary to move humanity toward a world beyond nuclear. Beyond Nuclear: 6930 Carroll Avenue, Suite 400, Takoma Park, MD 20912. Info@beyondnuclear.org, www.beyondnuclear.org.