

An Adaptive, Consent-Based Path to Nuclear Waste Storage and Disposal Solutions

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What are the key facts?

- The Department of Energy is committed to sustaining nuclear energy's role in America's low carbon future.
- Part of that commitment is offering solutions for the disposition of used nuclear fuel and high-level radioactive waste based upon the recommendations of the Blue Ribbon Commission for America's Nuclear Future.
- Any workable solution for the final disposition of used fuel and nuclear waste must be based not only on sound science but also on achieving public acceptance at the local, and state and tribal levels.

Today I spoke at the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners (NARUC) on the Quadrennial Energy Review and the continued importance of the President's all-of-the-above energy strategy in the fight against [climate change](#). I'd like to amplify one set of remarks.

[Nuclear energy](#) has played an important role in avoiding carbon pollution and providing affordable energy, providing nearly 20 percent of electrical generation in the U.S. over the past two decades and representing about 60 percent of carbon-free electricity in the United States. I made it clear to NARUC that the Department of Energy is committed to sustaining nuclear energy's role in America's low-carbon future.

Part of that commitment is offering solutions for the disposition of used nuclear fuel and high-level radioactive waste based upon the recommendations of the [Blue Ribbon Commission for America's Nuclear Future \(BRC\)](#). A core recommendation of the BRC was implementation of a consent-based process as a prerequisite for long-term success.

When President Obama took office, the timeline for opening Yucca Mountain had already been pushed back by two decades, stalled by public protest and legal opposition, with no end in sight. It was clear that the stalemate could continue indefinitely. The Administration made our position clear -- Yucca Mountain is not a workable solution, and we can do better.

President Obama directed Secretary Chu to establish the BRC in 2010 to conduct a comprehensive review of policies for managing the back end of the nuclear fuel cycle and to provide recommendations for developing a safe, long-term solution to managing the nation's used nuclear fuel and nuclear waste. I served on the commission, which was chaired by distinguished public servants Lee Hamilton and Brent Scowcroft.

In January 2013, the Administration issued the [Strategy for the Management and Disposal of Used Nuclear Fuel and High-Level Radioactive Waste](#). The strategy embraced the core findings of the BRC and affirmed that any workable solution for the final disposition of used fuel and nuclear waste must be based not only on sound science, but also on achieving public acceptance at the local, and state and tribal levels.

The Administration supports working with Congress to develop a consent-based process that is transparent, adaptive and technically sound. The BRC emphasized that flexibility, patience, responsiveness and a heavy emphasis on consultation and cooperation with all parties are necessary in the siting process and in all aspects of implementation.

The BRC and the Administration strategy also emphasize the importance of pursuing consolidated interim storage in parallel with looking at alternative sites for geologic disposal. A first priority is consent-based siting of a pilot-scale storage facility to accommodate used fuel from shutdown reactors. This is something we should all come together to support as a sensible first step towards building a robust used fuel disposal system that will stand the test of time.

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