

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-2004

August 18, 2020

The Honorable Kristine L. Svinicki
Chairman
U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Washington, DC 20555-0001

Dear Chairman Svinicki:

We write to express our opposition to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's decision to substitute in-person meetings in New Mexico with a series of webinars. The Commission previously committed to hold five public meetings in New Mexico to present on the results of the Holtec HI-STORE Consolidated Interim Storage Facility draft environmental impact analysis and receive the public's comments on the draft report. The issue of consolidated interim storage of nuclear waste in New Mexico has profound health and safety impacts for the citizens of New Mexico and they must be given every opportunity to understand these impacts as well as to comment on the findings.

We appreciate that the COVID-19 pandemic has created logistical and health concerns of its own to be able to move forward with in-person meetings at this time, but there are no legal or statutory deadlines requiring the Commission to rush to complete this review by any certain time. Therefore, we believe the best course of action is to pause the process until such time as it is safe to resume. The health and safety of New Mexicans as well as their ability to participate in a process that will ultimately impact them is much greater than the needs of any corporation seeking to have expeditious closure on its application.

Virtual meetings have limitations that must also be accounted for, such as technological hurdles and broadband access that some constituents may not be able to overcome, not to mention the direct health and economic impacts of the pandemic and financial crisis that our citizens may be dealing with. Decisions of storing high-level nuclear waste deserve the full attention and participation of the oversight organization in the communities that they will be impacting. Ultimately, there is no compelling public interest reason to justify this rush to replace meetings with virtual webinars, and this decision gives the Commission the appearance of valuing the preferences of a for-profit company looking to store highly dangerous nuclear waste over that of the public and their elected representatives.

We urge the Commission to pause its timeline for finalizing its report and making a decision on the license application until such time as the pandemic is under control enough that the Commission is able to safely and effectively live up to its commitment of in-person meetings in New Mexico. If you decide to continue with the webinars as announced, we believe these options should be supplementary, and in person meetings should still take place at a future time.

Sincerely,



Tom Udall
United States Senator



Martin Heinrich
United States Senator

cc: Members of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Board Commission