

ONE HUNDRED TWELFTH CONGRESS  
**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE  
2125 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING  
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6115

Majority (202) 225-2927  
Minority (202) 225-3641  
April 8, 2011

The Honorable John Shimkus  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Environment and Economy  
House Committee on Energy and Commerce  
2125 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Shimkus:

On March 31, 2011, you wrote to Energy Secretary Steven Chu to inform him that “Members of the Committee will be conducting site visits to ... the Yucca Mountain repository” during the upcoming congressional recess.<sup>1</sup> I am writing to urge you to cancel this site visit because of its excessive costs to the taxpayer.

On April 6, 2011, the Department of Energy provided the Committee with preliminary information regarding the cost of touring the Yucca Mountain repository. According to the Department, since Yucca Mountain has been closed for nearly two years, preparing the site for your tour would take significant resources. The Yucca Mountain tunnel would need to be reopened, equipment would need to be restarted and confirmed to be functional, and the facility would need to be tested for silica and radon. According to the Department, “The contractor has indicated that the cost to do that is \$175,000, which we would need to commit within the week.”<sup>2</sup>

The Department added:

Even taking these steps does not assure that the tour would be able to proceed into the YM site if the radon and silica tests exceed safe levels on the day of the visit. Were that

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<sup>1</sup> Letter from John Shimkus, Chairman, Subcommittee on Environment and Economy, Committee on Energy and Commerce, to Secretary Steven Chu, Department of Energy (Mar. 3, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> E-mail from Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Congressional and Intergovernmental Affairs, Department of Energy to Staff, Committee on Energy and Commerce (Apr. 4, 2011).

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to happen, the tour would have to be postponed or canceled, and the bulk of the contractor costs could not be recouped.<sup>3</sup>

Additionally, hiring several helicopters to transport members and staff from Las Vegas to Yucca Mountain would also be expensive. According to the Department:

There are two options for transportation to the Yucca Mountain site from Las Vegas. Traveling by helicopter would take less time, but would still require ground transportation on either end of the flight and would cost at least \$25,000 but possibly more depending on wait-time at the site and any additional stops. We estimate that a group of 12 Members would involve at least three helicopters. Small aircraft accommodating larger groups are not time efficient because of the unavailability of landing strips near the site. Traveling by bus would take several hours each way.<sup>4</sup>

At a time when the government is facing a shutdown over funding, it seems completely inappropriate to incur these needless expenses. I hope you will reconsider and announce the cancellation of the site visit to Yucca Mountain.

Sincerely,



Henry A. Waxman  
Ranking Member

cc: The Honorable Fred Upton  
Chairman

The Honorable Gene Green  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Environment and Economy

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<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*