Michigan legislators intensify fight against proposed nuclear-waste disposal site near Lake Huron

A proposal to store nuclear waste less than a mile from Lake Huron is drawing increased scrutiny and opposition, with Michigan lawmakers again weighing in with a new round of legislation and resolutions.

If its project is approved by Canadian regulators, Ontario Power Generation would build a 2,230-foot-deep geologic repository that would hold low- and intermediate-level radioactive waste.

The waste would come from reactors at Bruce Nuclear Generation Station and two other power plants in Ontario. The same types of waste have been stored above ground at Bruce (located on the shore of Lake Huron near the Thumb Peninsula that juts out into Lake Huron) and whose district touches the lake.

“The time to raise alarm bells and get engaged in this process is now, because once this project begins, you can’t undo it,” he says. “And the alarm bells should be going off beyond just the Thumb, but for everyone in the Great Lakes. It’s hard to believe that putting this waste 1,000 yards away from Lake Huron is the best option.”

The options for states to try to stop the Canadian proposal, however, are limited.

Last year, Michigan Rep. Sarah Roberts and Sen. Hoon-Yung Hopgood (both are members of the Great Lakes Legislative Caucus, and Pavlov is as well) testified before the three-member joint panel in Canada that is currently reviewing the proposal.

The two lawmakers also proposed resolutions urging a “careful review” of the planned repository (SR 58 [2]) and asking the U.S. to oppose the repository and Canada to find alternatives (HCR 7 [3]).

The most recent resolutions in Michigan (SR 151 [4] and HR 380 [5]) ask the president and U.S. Congress to “invoke the participation” of the International Joint Commission — the binational agency that addresses disputes between the U.S. and Canada over boundary waters. Pavlov and other Michigan lawmakers want the IJC to evaluate the disposal project. Two other resolutions (SR 150 [6] and HR 379 [7]) call on the Great Lakes Commission (an interstate compact agency) to study the plan and take a position on it.

Pavlov’s legislation (SB 948 [8]), meanwhile, calls for the state of Michigan to act as well. First, the state would form an advisory board to assess the health impacts and other potential consequences of the disposal plan.

Second, Michigan would prohibit the importation of radioactive waste and extend its current ban on nuclear waste disposal to include Class C waste, the most dangerous form of low-level nuclear waste — and the type of waste, Pavlov says, that would be permanently disposed at the Ontario site.

He has also created an online petition, www.ProtectLakeHuron.com.

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