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The Obama administration's efforts to abandon Yucca Mountain as a storage site for nuclear waste were dealt a setback Tuesday, as a federal appeals court ruled that the Nuclear Regulatory Commission must issue a ruling on the site's permit application.

The 2-1 ruling said the administration's directives "violate the law," which designates Yucca Mountain as the United States' nuclear waste repository, Reuters reports. Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz has expressed support for finding alternatives to Yucca Mountain, which has been met with mixed reviews in the House and Senate.

In July, Moniz presented the administration's view that wrangling over the long-disputed Yucca site has "no end in sight." The "stalemate," he said, "couldn't continue indefinitely." Moniz was appointed by President Obama to serve on a blue-ribbon commission tasked with finding alternatives to Yucca Mountain, and the commission's proposals have served as a framework for Senate legislation that calls for finding alternative storage facilities.

House Energy and Commerce Committee Chairman Fred Upton, R-Mich., and Environment and the Economy Subcommittee Chairman John Shimkus, R-Ill., issued a joint statement praising the ruling. "The Obama administration rejected the law and prematurely terminated the Yucca Mountain repository program, but Congress and the courts have spoken out to prevent billions of taxpayer dollars and three decades of research from being squandered," the pair said.

Another Republican, Sen. Dean Heller of Nevada, had a far different reaction to the renewed

focus on his state as a nuclear storage site. "This ruling is an exercise in futility that will ultimately waste resources that could be better used elsewhere," Heller said. "Instead of continuing to try to force Yucca Mountain on the people of Nevada, my colleagues should focus on moving forward towards a new process that will allow for consent-based siting."

Meanwhile, Moniz and Nevada Gov. Brian Sandoval are meeting Tuesday as they continue to dispute whether the state has agreed to take on storage of nuclear waste.

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