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## Hastings Announces He Will Retire at End of Year

Congressman Doc Hastings  
February 13, 2014

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Today [Thursday, February 13], Rep. Doc Hastings (WA-4) announced that he will retire from Congress at the end of year.

"Two decades ago, the people of Central Washington first voted to place their trust in me to represent them in Congress. In the nine subsequent elections, I've been humbled to have been given the privilege to serve as their common sense voice and to work for solutions to improve our local communities and pursue a better, brighter future for our Nation. It is with deep appreciation for that privilege that I announce that this will be my final term in office and that I will not run for reelection in November.

My ambition as a Congressman then and now has been the same: to do the best job I can to serve Central Washington. Last Friday, I celebrated my 73rd birthday and while I have the ability and seniority to continue serving Central Washington, it is time for the voters to choose a new

person with new energy to represent them in the people's House.

But my job is not yet done. Over the coming year I intend to work as hard as ever on behalf of Central Washington. There are a number of community priorities that I am dedicated to seeing achieved in the months ahead.

Without question, my family weighed heavily in my decision. When I was first elected in 1994, my wife Claire and I were proud parents of three young adults who were just starting to make their own way in the world. Today, in addition, Claire and I have two sons-in-law and a daughter-in-law and are the grandparents of eight. As of last year all three of our children's families now call Washington state their home. Claire has always been my greatest supporter and the hardest part of every week is leaving her Monday morning to catch an airplane to Washington, DC. She and I both look forward with anticipation to the time we will have together and with our family after my term ends in January."

#### Background

In 1974, Doc Hastings entered politics when he was elected Franklin County Republican Party Chair. An early supporter of Ronald Reagan, Hastings was chosen as a delegate for Reagan who was competing against President Ford for the nomination at the 1976 Republican National Convention. He served as a Member of the House of Representatives in the State Legislature from 1979 to 1987 representing the 16th Legislative District and chose to leave in order to spend more time with his family.

In 1994, Doc Hastings was elected to Congress to represent Washington's Fourth Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives beating Democratic incumbent Jay Inslee. That year Republicans gained control of the House of Representatives for the first time in 40 years.

During his tenure in Congress Hastings has served on the House National Security Committee (1995-1997); House Natural Resources Committee (1995-present: Ranking Member 2009-2011, Chairman 2011-present); House Rules Committee (1997-2009); House Budget Committee (2001-2005); House Ethics Committee (2001- 2009: Chairman 2005-2007, Ranking Member 2007-2009); the Republican Steering Committee (2003-present); and as Assistant Whip (1999-present).

Hastings founded the House Nuclear Cleanup Caucus and serves as its Chairman in order to better educate Members of Congress and staff about cleaning up nuclear waste created by our nation's World War II and Cold War era nuclear weapons production program, including waste at the Hanford site, which is the world's largest and most complex environmental cleanup effort.

#### **Funding for WIPP salt tests in jeopardy**

Current-Argus

February 12, 2014

[LINK](#)

CARLSBAD >> Studies that could determine the future for nuclear activities in Southeastern New Mexico could be the latest victim of budget fights in Washington, D.C.

The Department of Energy's nuclear energy budget for 2014 included funding for high temperature salt studies at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant, an underground nuclear waste repository located 26 miles east of Carlsbad, WIPP personnel and scientists had planned to begin testing underground in the facility's north mine later this year but funding for the project will likely be cut according to Carlsbad Mayor Dale Janway.

Janway said he received a notification late last week that the funding had been cut.

"It is our understanding that this decision was made because the White House Office of Management and Budget did not find specific language to authorize the use of technology funding for salt research," Janway said in a Wednesday press release. "This is a tragic loss of momentum on a project that is greatly needed for the future."

Supporters of WIPP say the experiments could pave the way for further disposal of radioactive waste in the salt beds east of Carlsbad. A Department of Energy spokeswoman said the office believes the research will provide valuable insights. Only an act of Congress can change the mission of WIPP, which currently only accepts defense-related transuranic nuclear waste.

"Our office is working with the Senate offices to understand the administration's decision and ultimately resolve any problems," said Eric Layer, communications director for U.S. Rep. Steve Pearce.

Janway has urged the New Mexico congressional delegation to fight to keep \$5 million in the Nuclear Energy budget to fund generic thermal testing at WIPP.

U.S. Senators Tom Udall and Martin Heinrich issued a joint statement in support of funding for the salt studies.

"We have supported this salt study as a part of a broad DOE research program into various future disposal options to be led and directed by scientific experts," Udall and Heinrich said in the statement. "We have been in contact with the administration asking to find another source of funding that would allow the salt study to continue."

### **Excessive radiation levels detected at New Mexico waste site**

Reuters

February 16, 2014

[LINK](#)

Underground sensors have detected excessive radiation levels inside a nuclear waste storage site deep below New Mexico's desert, but no

workers have been exposed and there was no risk to public health, U.S. Department of Energy officials said on Sunday.

An air-monitoring alarm went off at 11:30 p.m. local time Friday indicating unsafe concentrations of radiation inside the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant in what DOE officials said appeared to be the first such mishap since the facility opened in 1999.

As of Sunday, the source of the high radiation readings had yet to be determined, and a plan to send inspection teams below ground to investigate was put on hold as a precaution.

"They will not go in today. It's a safety thing more than anything. We're waiting until we get other assessments done before we authorize re-entry," DOE spokesman Bill Mackie said.

The facility, located in southeastern New Mexico near Carlsbad, is designed as a repository for so-called transuranic waste, which includes discarded machinery, clothing and other materials contaminated with plutonium or other radioisotopes heavier than uranium.

The waste, shipped in from other DOE nuclear laboratories and weapons sites around the country, is buried in underground salt formations that gradually close in around the disposal casks and seal them from the outside world.

No workers were underground when the apparent radiation leak was detected in the vicinity of the plant's waste-disposal platform, and none of the 139 employees working above ground at the time was exposed, the Energy Department said.

The alarm automatically switched the underground ventilation system to filtration to keep any releases from reaching the surface, DOE officials said.

Subsequent testing of surface air in and around the facility showed the incident posed no danger to human health or the environment, Mackie said.

Air-monitor alarms at the facility have been tripped in the past by malfunctions or fluctuations in levels of radon, a naturally occurring radioactive gas. But officials said they believe this to be the first real alarm since the plant began operations.

Just a few dozen essential personnel, including security officers, remained at the site over the weekend.

Inbound waste shipments had already been suspended at the plant since a truck caught fire there earlier this month in an accident that left several workers suffering smoke inhalation.

"We're in shutdown mode," Mackie said.

The facility in the Chihuahuan Desert normally receives up to 6,000 cubic meters of radioactive waste a year and employs more than 800 workers. The site is expected to continue to accept radiological materials until 2030, Mackie said.

## **Governor wants answers from DOE on Hanford cleanup**

Tri--City Herald

February 15, 2014

[LINK](#)

The state expects answers by the end of the month after being kept in the dark about federal plans to clean up Hanford radioactive waste held in underground tanks, said Washington Gov. Jay Inslee.

"There is a growing level of frustration on the lack of information coming from the Department of Energy," Jaime Smith, spokeswoman for Inslee, said late last week.

Despite "concerted efforts," the state has failed to get details from the federal government about possible solutions outlined in a document the Department of Energy called a "framework" that was released in September, said a letter signed by the governor.

The letter, which also was signed by state Attorney General Bob Ferguson, was sent to Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz and U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder.

Federal officials told state representatives that DOE and the Justice Department would provide the state with a proposal by the end of this month to amend a court-enforced consent decree setting deadlines for tank waste cleanup, the letter said.

However, the federal government has notified the state that it may not be able to meet most remaining deadlines in the consent decree signed in 2010 to settle a lawsuit brought by the state of Washington and joined by the state of Oregon. The consent decree set new deadlines to replace some of those in the legally binding Tri-Party Agreement that DOE already had missed or had no hope of meeting despite repeated extensions.

All remaining consent decree deadlines for the \$12.2 billion vitrification plant under construction at Hanford are at serious risk of being missed, DOE has told the state. The plant is intended to treat much of the 56 million gallons of waste held in underground tanks from the past production of weapons plutonium. The plant is required to begin operating in 2019 and be at full operation in 2022.

In addition, DOE has said that it may not have two of 16 underground waste tanks in the group called the C Tank Farm emptied by a deadline of Sept. 30. Six of the tanks have not been declared empty yet. Waste in leak-prone single-shell tanks is being emptied into newer double-shell tanks until it can be treated for disposal.

The framework document outlines a possible path forward, as some construction at the vitrification plant has been stopped because of technical issues that need to be resolved to ensure the safe and efficient operation of the plant. All construction has stopped at the Pretreatment Facility and some construction has stopped at the High Level Waste Facility.

The framework document proposed a phased approach to advance waste treatment and disposal, but gave few technical, cost or schedule details.

It proposed initially pretreating some of the waste before it is sent to the vitrification plant for treatment at the Low Activity Waste Facility, allowing it to bypass the troubled Pretreatment Facility. It also discussed sending some of the waste to a national repository in New Mexico for transuranic waste -- typically waste contaminated with plutonium -- without glassifying it at the vitrification plant.

The state and federal agencies have met three times to discuss the framework document and to review the consent decree, but "many important details still have not been provided and our questions remain unanswered," Smith said.

Inslee and Ferguson not only expect to see a proposal to amend the consent decree by the end of the month, but expect it to comprehensively address all consent decree and Tri-Party Agreement requirements for tank waste retrieval and treatment, according to the letter.

"An acceptable path forward must also be aggressive but realistic," the letter said. "It must be a path that gives the state confidence that tank waste retrieval and treatment will be completed as soon as possible."

### **2014 Hanford spending plan revealed**

Tri-City Herald  
February 14, 2014  
[LINK](#)

Work to prepare for cleaning up one of Hanford's most notorious burial grounds, 618-10, will be accelerated with money in the fiscal 2014 Hanford budget.

Other plans call for speeding up work to remove some radioactively contaminated soil just north of Richland and continuing the momentum to complete demolition of the Plutonium Finishing Plant by a legal deadline of fall 2016, according to Matt McCormick, manager of the Department of Energy Richland Operations Office.

DOE discussed the fiscal 2014 budget for the first time this week since Congress worked out a budget deal Jan. 13 and the president signed it four days later. The fiscal year began Oct. 1.

The administration's budget request, which was released in April, proposed a budget that about matched the budget for fiscal 2012 before mandatory budget cuts, or sequestration, reduced spending at Hanford in fiscal 2013.

The budget finally approved by Congress for fiscal 2014 included \$200 million more than the administration's request for DOE's nationwide environmental cleanup program.

"The overall support, particularly the \$200 million in environmental management, is a testament to the commitment and confidence Congress has in DOE's environmental management program, which includes Hanford," McCormick said.

About \$20 million of the \$200 million will go to Hanford to bring the budget for the DOE Hanford Richland Operations Office to \$1.013 billion, thanks to efforts of Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash. That's in addition to restoring about \$79 million for that office lost in fiscal 2013 to sequestration.

The Richland Operations Office is responsible for all Hanford work except the management and treatment of 56 million gallons of radioactive waste held in underground tanks in central Hanford.

The additional \$20 million includes \$15 million that will be added primarily to the budget for cleanup along the Columbia River at Hanford.

The Richland Operations Office is focused on its "2015 Vision," which calls for the demolition of the Plutonium Finishing Plant, continuing efforts to clean up contaminated groundwater and completion of most environmental cleanup on Hanford land along the Columbia River.

The additional money will allow DOE to build a full-scale mockup of a vertical pipe unit like those at the 618-10 Burial Ground about six miles north of Richland. The mockup will be used to test techniques to make sure they are safe and reliable before work starts on the vertical pipe units, McCormick said.

From 1954-63, some of the worst of the research waste generated at Hanford's 300 Area was trucked to the 618-10 burial ground. Waste, some of it highly radioactive, was packaged in cans and buckets and dropped down pipes buried vertically.

Tentative plans call for driving a steel pipe into the ground around the pipes and then using an auger to smash up the waste, including the walls of the pipes. Different techniques then could be used to remove the waste, depending on its radioactivity.

The additional money for river corridor cleanup also would be used to accelerate work that can be done now that a 1,153-ton vault and a 1,082-ton test reactor have been lifted out of the ground in the 300 Area just north of Richland. Work now must be done to clean up contaminated soil and piping and the underground concrete structure that housed the test reactor.

Work on one of the most challenging projects remaining in the 300 Area, the highly radioactive spill beneath the 324 Building, already had been included in the administration's budget request. A subcontract has been awarded this year for the engineering on a system to dig up the soil, working from within a hot cell of the building.

The remainder of the \$20 million increase -- \$5 million -- will bring the account for Richland community and regulatory support back to just less than \$20 million, the approximate level of previous years, for fiscal 2014. The account covers payment in lieu of taxes to local government and schools, the Hanford Advisory Board and Hanford regulatory activities, among other uses.

The fiscal 2014 budget will allow momentum to continue to remove glove boxes and other highly contaminated equipment and prepare the Plutonium Finishing Plant for demolition, McCormick said. The project is on schedule to meeting a legally binding deadline to have the plant down in September 2016, he said.

Spending on groundwater cleanup will decrease in fiscal 2014 because of the completion of the construction and startup of Hanford's largest and most complex groundwater treatment system, the 200 West Groundwater Treatment Facility.

Work will continue to treat contaminated groundwater at multiple plants, but a project to expand protection of the Columbia River near the former N Reactor remains on the fence. DOE is discussing with Hanford regulators and its contractor whether an underground chemical barrier can be expanded this year or next, McCormick said.

Injection wells have been drilled, but Hanford workers still need to inject chemicals that will form calcium phosphate, or apatite, that will chemically bind strontium and halt its migration toward the river.

DOE will continue work to build an annex at the K East Basin and purchase equipment needed to remove radioactive sludge that is stored in underwater containers at the basin. In a previous presentation on the level of spending for the K Basins, DOE did not indicate that the \$99 million budget would be enough to start sludge removal.

The Hanford Office of River Protection, which is responsible for tank waste, has funding levels unchanged from the administration's budget request released in April.

It will have \$690 million to spend in fiscal 2014 at the vitrification plant being built to treat the waste. That is the annual amount long planned to provide steady funding to build the plant.

The tank farms could have had as little \$409 million if Congress had not agreed on a fiscal budget for this year, but will receive \$520 million.

Money will be spent to empty single-shell tanks, replace aging infrastructure and prepare to feed waste to the vitrification plant in the

future.

## **DOE considering underground plant at Hanford**

Tri-City Herald  
February 17, 2014  
[LINK](#)

The Department of Energy is considering building an underground plant that would use the same technologies as the troubled Pretreatment Facility at Hanford's vitrification plant, but on a smaller scale.

The possible interim pretreatment system is one of the solutions discussed in what DOE called a "framework" document, released in September after a year of study of the plant's technical issues.

It outlined for discussion a possible phased startup of the \$12.3 billion vitrification plant to allow some waste to be treated for disposal while technical issues still are being addressed.

A presentation at a Hanford Advisory Board committee meeting Thursday was the first time DOE has discussed in detail how the framework proposes to bypass the Pretreatment Facility, where construction has stopped while technical issues are resolved. However, it's too early to know what an interim pretreatment system outside the plant might cost or how long it would take to build and begin operating.

DOE has 56 million gallons of radioactive and hazardous chemical waste in a combination of liquid and solid forms held in underground tanks awaiting treatment for permanent disposal. The waste is left from the past production of plutonium for the nation's nuclear weapons program.

The vitrification plant is planned to separate waste at its Pretreatment Facility into low-activity radioactive waste and high-level radioactive waste for glassification at separate facilities.

To get glassification started sooner, DOE is looking at separating out some low-activity waste from the rest of the tank waste while it is still at the tank farms, where the 56 million gallons of waste are stored. Then it would be sent directly to the vitrification plant's Low Activity Waste Facility, which could be finished next year. There it would be turned into glass logs within canisters that would be buried at a Hanford landfill already built for that waste, the Integrated Disposal Facility.

DOE has looked at early treatment of low-activity waste since the early 2000s, said Steve Pfaff, DOE project director for the vitrification plant. But it didn't make substantial progress on the idea until about 2008, when an expert panel recommended a two-step process to get a low-activity waste stream out of the tanks.

The panel recommended using filtering to get the suspended solids out of the tank liquids and then an ion exchange process to get dissolved cesium out of the liquids, similar to the two-stop process the vit plant's

Pretreatment Facility is planned to use. The process would leave a largely decontaminated waste stream with some hazardous chemicals and some remaining radioactivity, Pfaff said.

But in a change from previous proposals for bypassing the Pretreatment Facility, DOE now wants an interim pretreatment system that has enough capacity to feed two melters for waste and glass at the Low Activity Waste Facility. That would produce five canisters of glass a day that stand 7.5 feet tall and are 4.5 feet wide when the facility is running at 100 percent efficiency.

Earlier studies had looked at either building a new facility at the tank farms or inserting equipment inside tanks to produce a low-activity waste stream to treat.

No decision has been made, but creating an underground interim pretreatment system to produce the low-activity waste stream would allow a large enough system to be built to feed the Low Activity Waste Facility as it runs at full capacity, Pfaff said.

The interim plant would be mostly underground to provide shielding from radiation.

It would include a system of pipes that look like solid metal, but would have tiny pores, just as in the ultrafiltration system that will be used at the vit plant's Pretreatment Facility, which covers a footprint larger than a football field.

At the interim system, tank liquid would pass around the outside of the pipes at a high flow rate allowing liquid waste to filter into the pipe without pulling along much of the solids, which contain much of the high-level radioactive waste.

Then the filtered liquid would be sent to a system of ion exchange columns, also underground. They would use the same resin as planned at the vit plant's Pretreatment Facility to strip out dissolved cesium, which also is being treated as high-level radioactive waste.

The resulting liquid would be very similar to the low-activity waste stream that would come out of the vit plant's Pretreatment Facility, Pfaff said. The interim facility likely would be fed waste from Tank AP-107, one of Hanford's 28 double-shell tanks.

The technology is well-developed because it has been studied for the vitrification plant and also would provide more flexibility than in-tank treatment, he said.

DOE has studied in-tank pretreatment at its Savannah River nuclear site, and it would have the advantage of radiation shielding provided by the tank. The technology relies on inserting a column with 25 microfiltration disks on it. The column would spin and liquid would leak inside the disks and be pumped up the column. An ion exchange system also could be fitted inside a tank. But the number of risers allowing access into underground tanks would limit how many systems could be fitted inside

the tank.

DOE has instructed its contractor, Washington River Protection Solutions, to prepare a cost and technical proposal for initial design activities of an interim pretreatment system.

DOE's typical design process takes seven years, but DOE would do everything it could to advance a design and make glass as quickly as possible, Pfaff said. DOE already has warned the state of Washington that it is at risk of not meeting court-enforced deadlines to have the plant at full operation in 2022.

An interim pretreatment facility will increase costs for treating Hanford tank waste, Pfaff said. But getting the vitrification plant into operation is a top priority and there also are other advantages, he said. It will allow DOE to train vit plant operators starting with the least radioactive waste and also allow a ramp up of the Analytical Laboratory and the support facilities for the plant, he said.

Eventually, the interim pretreatment system also could free up some double-shell tank space. DOE is emptying waste from 149 leak-prone single-shell tanks into 28 newer double-shell tanks. But those tanks are nearing capacity and the oldest of the double-shell tanks has a leak between its shells and may need to be emptied also.

An interim pretreatment facility, which could be designed to be used for 25 years, could continue to be used after the vit plant's Pretreatment Facility begins operating during periods when it is offline for maintenance or other issues.

## **Obama signs clean debt hike**

The Hill

February 15, 2014

[LINK](#)

President Obama on Saturday signed into law the bill raising the nation's debt ceiling.

Obama signed the bill in California, where he is staying for the weekend before a trip to Mexico next week. A White House aide told CBS News that the bills were flown to Palm Springs, Calif. for Obama to sign.

The debt bill approved by Congress this week suspends the debt ceiling until March 15, 2015. Surplus spending between now and then will be added to the nation's \$17.2 trillion debt.

Hundreds of billions of dollars in spending are likely to be added in the next year.

Obama demanded that Congress approve a clean debt hike, and House Republicans accomodated him after being unable to agree on any provisions to add to the bill.

Both parties wanted to avoid an extended fiscal fight, but GOP leaders were especially wary of the battle ahead of the midterm elections. The GOP's approval ratings were sunk last year after the government shutdown.

On Wednesday, the Senate passed the bill in a party-line vote, but only after a 67-31 procedural vote in which Senate GOP Leader Mitch McConnell (Ky.) cast a key vote.

### **Landrieu's gavel comes with risks**

The Hill

February 13, 2014

[LINK](#)

Sen. Mary Landrieu's (D-La.) new powers as chairman of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee could end up being a double-edged sword for her already-difficult reelection chances.

The Bayou Democrat took over the plum post on Wednesday evening, which could allow her to push legislation popular back home that boosts the oil industry, all while distancing herself from an unpopular President Obama.

But it also raises the pressure on her to deliver for home-state constituents. If she falters, her pitch risks ringing hollow as voters questions her ability to deliver.

Republicans like Louisiana GOP Chairman Roger Villere are already pledging to make her chairmanship a liability.

"For years she has donated to anti-energy Senators and helped keep Harry Reid and his anti-energy team in control of the Senate," Villere said in a release to be issued Thursday. An early copy was provided to The Hill.

"She has consistently put special interests above what's best for Louisiana's energy economy," added Villere, who called Landrieu's chairmanship "the epitome of hypocrisy."

Meanwhile, on the left, Landrieu risks tensions with green groups that had signaled a tentative cease-fire with the Democrat.

Billionaire environmentalist Tom Steyer, who spent \$8 million on the Virginia race for governor last year, showed a willingness to target Landrieu for her support of Keystone XL pipeline, putting her in a tough spot on an issue she may be pressured to move on as chairwoman.

Landrieu's supporters see the chairmanship as concrete evidence of the benefits of her seniority. The chairmanship gives her more power to set the agenda on energy issues going forward, they say.

"There is a difference between casting a vote and setting policy for the nation, especially for a state like Louisiana that's at the forefront of national gas discovery and production," a Landrieu aide said.

Whether the chairmanship boosts or hinders Landrieu could determine which party holds the Senate.

Landrieu's seat is a must-win for Republicans if they hope to win back the majority, and a poll out this week showed her neck-and-neck with her likely GOP opponent, Rep. Bill Cassidy (La.).

Industry experts expect Landrieu to pursue an ambitious agenda as chairman of the committee, especially with a critical ally, Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska), as her ranking member.

Landrieu has described the U.S. as having a "renaissance" in energy, with domestic crude oil production surpassing imports for the first time in nearly 20 years.

She's eager to play a major role in shaping new policies, but will face obvious challenges in getting anything done.

One of her top priorities has been a measure that would allow for increased oil and gas revenues from offshore development in the Gulf of Mexico to go to energy-producing coastal states like Louisiana.

Matt Lee-Ashley, a senior fellow at the liberal think tank Center for American Progress, thinks the senator will push the measure in her new post, but her efforts may not bear fruit before the election.

"I think she will push very hard to get something on revenue sharing through committee but it will be hard to get much further than that before November, given its immense price tag and the opposition it faces," Lee-Ashley said.

Divides within the GOP over lifting a decades-old crude oil export ban means Landrieu may be unable to move legislation on that issue either, he said.

It could also be difficult to move forward because of differences among Democrats. Landrieu will have to contend with liberal committee members like Sens. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) and Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.).

The Landrieu aide pushed back at that suggestion, however, arguing that Republicans are to blame for any inaction.

"If Republicans want to make this an unproductive Congress that's their choice but that's not going to stop Sen. Landrieu from staying focused on Louisiana and fighting to pass flood insurance relief, building the Keystone pipeline and increasing domestic energy production," the aide said.

Oil industry leaders say their patience with Landrieu is running out and that her chairmanship ups the ante for her to deliver.

"She still has substantial support within the oil and gas industry, but she's been given 17 years. Some of her previous supporters are looking at this and saying, we think Cassidy could do a better job," said Ragan Dickens,

communications director of Louisiana Oil & Gas Association.

"Now that she is in this driver's seat the industry does want to see some action," he added.

While the Louisiana Oil and Gas itself is nonpartisan, its president, Don Briggs, hosted a fundraiser for Cassidy.

Still, Louisiana political observers say she shouldn't shy away from the power the post gives her.

J. Bennett Johnston Jr., a former Louisiana Democratic senator who held the same post when he was in office, said his advice has been to tout her position frequently on the campaign trail.

"I would tell her -- and I have told her, and she is doing it on her own -- to tell the truth about the power of the committee," he said. "Just talk about what the jurisdiction is, what she can do for the state in the position."

He added that he doesn't believe the Republican arguments of hypocrisy will hold any water with the energy industry there.

"There's no chink in that armor. You can't get Mary Landrieu on being anything but pro-energy, and I think that will come across in Louisiana, especially as she leads the Energy Committee," he said.

But Bernie Pinsonat, a prominent state pollster who has clients from both parties, warned that may still not be enough in a state that's moving away from Democrats.

"Energy may be a positive, but the question is, is it enough? Will it be enough to divert Louisiana voters' attention, or will enough voters think this is more important than her vote for ObamaCare?" he said.

### **Nuclear Waste Storage on Texas Lawmakers' Agenda**

The Texas Tribune

February 12, 2014

[LINK](#)

Could Texas' wide-open spaces help solve the country's nuclear waste storage problem?

House Speaker Joe Straus wants to find out. He has instructed lawmakers to study the economic potential of storing highly radioactive nuclear waste in Texas, a notion that has drawn pushback from environmentalists.

But if past and present politics are any guide, the state, already home to some low-level radioactive waste, won't house the higher-level waste any time soon -- even if Texans agree they want it.

"I did not expect this to be brought up," said Dale Klein, associate director of the University of Texas Energy Institute and the former chairman of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission. "I just don't see

any movement. It's a real stalemate."

Amid Washington's long-thwarted search for a final resting place for the roughly 70,000 metric tons and counting of spent nuclear fuel and other highly radioactive waste, many observers echo Klein's assessment. Meanwhile, waste continues to pile up at temporary storage facilities at operating and shuttered reactor sites throughout the country. Now, Texas lawmakers are set to consider whether the state could be part of the solution and, if so, how Texas might benefit.

In interim charges released in late January, Straus instructed the House Environmental Regulation Committee to "study the rules, laws, and regulations pertaining to the disposal of high-level radioactive waste in Texas and determine the potential economic impact of permitting a facility in Texas."

Straus also told the committee to "make specific recommendations on the state and federal actions necessary to permit a high-level radioactive waste disposal or interim storage facility in Texas."

Erin Daly, a spokeswoman for Straus, said the speaker's idea came after he reviewed a 2012 report from the Blue Ribbon Commission on America's Nuclear Future, assembled by President Obama, which recommended that U.S. lawmakers focus on gathering state and local consent before proposing a new facility.

Straus has offered few specifics on the idea, such as where a Texas facility might be. That would be for the House committee to decide.

"The speaker looks forward to the committee's review of the issue and their detailed report," Daly said.

Texas, with its ample space and arid climate, could be an ideal home for the nation's nuclear waste, some observers say.

"You've got a large state with so much potential," said Brian O'Connell, director of the Nuclear Waste Program for the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners from 1999 to 2013. "You've got lots of wide-open spaces."

In 1984, Deaf Smith County, which nudges the New Mexico border in the Texas Panhandle, was among three finalists for a repository before lawmakers chose Yucca Mountain. The issue divided the community, which sits atop the Ogallala Aquifer; it pitted farmers and ranchers concerned about risks to groundwater against merchants hoping the site would add jobs and tax revenue, spurring the local economy.

A 2003 University of Nevada, Las Vegas study estimated that a repository at Yucca Mountain would add \$228 million to Nevada's economy each year during construction and \$127 million annually during operation. The study also said the government would need to construct a robust outreach program to prevent potential economic losses, such as businesses uprooting due to the stigma surrounding nuclear waste.

Partly because of the past objections, Deaf Smith is unlikely to resurface as a possible host, said Klein. State lawmakers are more likely to eye

communities in West Texas. Officials in Howard and Loving counties have expressed interest.

But the idea of housing the waste anywhere in Texas has stirred angst among environmental groups, who, just hours after Straus released his plans, had already rebuked it.

"It's idiotic to even consider disposing of high-level radioactive waste in Texas. Other states have rejected having high-level radioactive waste dumped on them," Tom "Smitty" Smith, director of Public Citizen's Texas office, said in a statement. "It's all risk and very little reward for Texans."

Though the nuclear energy industry insists that temporary waste disposal -- either in pools or sealed in dry casks of metal or concrete -- is safe and environmentally sound, it has long agreed that sealing the waste in geologic formations deep underground boosts protection against terrorist attacks and natural disasters, such as the earthquake and tsunami that rocked Japan's Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power station in 2011.

For more than 20 years, Washington saw Nevada's Yucca Mountain as the solution, and the federal government spent tens of millions of dollars preparing it to accept the waste. But Nevada's congressional delegation -- led by Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, a Democrat -- has thwarted the project. And, facing significant political pressure, the Obama administration has abandoned the Yucca plans.

That has left untapped a \$30 billion waste disposal fund collected from U.S. electricity ratepayers. Meanwhile, as nuclear power generators foot the bill for interim storage at their reactors, they are winning large breach-of-contract disputes against the federal government, which had promised to take the waste off their hands by 1998. The U.S. Department of Energy expects those payments to total \$21 billion by 2020. That means taxpayers are essentially paying twice for disposal.

Texas is already home to one of the nation's few facilities that accept low-level nuclear waste. Since 2012, Waste Control Specialists in Andrews County, a company that was formally owned by the late Dallas billionaire Harold Simmons, has disposed of contaminated tools, building materials and protective clothing, among other items, from shuttered reactors and hospitals.

Environmentalists have closely scrutinized the company as it has broadened the scale of the waste it accepts, and the Sierra Club has challenged the site's permits in court, saying the group was never given a hearing to voice its objections to the project -- namely that groundwater would enter its disposal wells.

"It just seems like the goalposts constantly move," said Cyrus Reed, conservation director for the group's Texas chapter.

Even if Texas asks for consideration, Congress would need to change the 1987 law naming Yucca Mountain as the nation's repository for high-level radioactive waste. The U.S. House and Senate remain sharply divided on the issue.

While the Senate, led by Reid, seeks to look beyond Yucca Mountain,

the House wants to see the project through, citing the large investments already made.

"Billions of dollars, both public and private, have been invested in developing the storage facility at Yucca Mountain. We can't just abandon this project," U.S. Rep. Joe Barton, R-Ennis, said in a statement to The Texas Tribune. "The debate in Washington is more about politics, than practical science and it doesn't look like a solution is coming soon."

In the time it takes Congress to ultimately reach a consensus, turnover in state legislatures could mean that Texas or any other state that might ask host a site will change its mind.

Still, advocates of permanent storage say they will monitor discussions in Texas, hoping the talk will educate more people about a political standoff that's costing U.S. taxpayers billions of dollars.

"Any interest outside the Beltway is positive," said Everett Redmond, director of nonproliferation and fuel cycle policy at the Nuclear Energy Institute in Washington.

With the difficulties in mind, some -- Barton included -- have suggested permitting one or two centralized facilities to temporarily store the waste while Washington continues to wrangle over the long-term site. Such a plan would not solve the long-term disposal issue, but it would remove responsibility from electric generators and halt the lawsuits against the federal government.

Developing even a temporary site, however, could take as long as 10 years, Redmond said.

Texas lawmakers will also study the feasibility of bringing to the state an interim facility, which would store waste from around the country, according to Straus' instructions.

"I would welcome one of those facilities in Texas, as long as the community welcomes it," Barton said.