

# Funding brings hope for DOE site

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LATA Kentucky's scrap metal removal project saw the elimination of 30,500 tons of contaminated scrap metal on 27 acres in the northwest corner of the Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant. A federal spending bill expected to pass by Sunday includes \$265 million for the Department of Energy's cleanup operations at the plant.

Federal funding for cleanup operations at the Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant has shed a little light on what once seemed a bleak economic landscape.

A \$1.012 trillion omnibus spending bill, signed Jan. 17, allotted \$265 million to the U.S. Department of Energy for cleanup efforts at the Paducah site.

While the details of how the money will be spent have yet to emerge, local officials hope that the funding could return jobs to the area.

"It's really, really great news for the community. It was very dark for awhile as far as what was going to happen out at the plant," Mayor Gayle Kaler said.

The United States Enrichment Corporation announced last May that it would cease enrichment operations at the Paducah site, which employed more than 1,000 workers. In another blow to local workers, DOE cleanup contractor LATA Kentucky laid off 79 hourly positions and 12 salaried worker positions in December due to budget constraints.

But now that funding for the DOE's cleanup operations has been secured, new contracts could mitigate the impact of the layoffs.

Charlie Martin, executive vice president of Paducah Economic Development, said the funds have the potential to create close to 2,000 jobs, based on the amount of money spent and jobs created at the Portsmouth, Ohio gaseous diffusion plant.

"That's why we're optimistic about the ability to address the layoff situation," he said.

Martin added that the DOE and Global Laser Enrichment, a subsidiary of GE-Hitachi, are expected to reach a final agreement regarding GLE's proposed reuse of the site within the next few months.

The GLE proposal, which was announced in November, shows plans for licensing, constructing and operating an enrichment facility at the DOE site.

"Any time you get a large capital construction project (such as GLE's), there's all kinds of local support that would be needed, whether they are survey firms, engineering firms or material firms," Martin said. "It would just be a huge boost to the economy."

Even the service industry near the plant has felt the pain of the layoffs, and business owners look forward to some form of activity resuming soon. Priyanka Patel, owner of Indian Hills Trading Post in Kevil, said business has been slow at the gas station this winter.

"I hope ... the laid-off people get their jobs back so we really get busy," she said. "We really hope business gets better."