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Congressman Doc Hastings to Speak at ECA Peer Exchange on Thursday, February 27 at 3PM

ECA

Congressman Doc Hastings has been added to the agenda for the ECA Peer Exchange: DOE Moving Forward. Congressman Hastings will speak at approximately 3PM on Thursday, February 27.

DOE's WIPP Recovery Information Center Provides Updates on the Site's February 14 Radiological Event

Waste Isolation Pilot Plant

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Visit this special section of the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant home page to learn about the latest recovery activities regarding the February 14, 2014 radiological event at WIPP. Plus, it includes useful background information for stakeholders from WIPP and links to outside sources.

Latest Recovery Activities

Here are the latest recovery activities in response to the February 14

More Information

[ECA Peer Exchange: DOE Moving Forward](#)

Washington, D.C.
February 27-28, 2014
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radiological event at WIPP.

- A plan to safely re-enter the mine
- Preparations are in progress on the surface at WIPP to safely contain contamination in the mine
- Personnel who re-enter the mine will have appropriate protective equipment
- Completing a work plan to replace the high efficiency air particulate (HEPA) filters in the Filter Exhaust Building on the surface to filter any contaminants from the mine
- Re-enter the mine and return the mine to safe conditions
- Developing plans to return to normal waste disposal operations

Hastings leaves legacy of support for Hanford

Tri-City Herald
February 22, 2014
[LINK](#)

(Editor's note: This is part one of a two-part series looking back at the career of Rep. Doc Hastings, R-Wash.)

Rep. Doc Hastings has 10 more months to be a thorn in the side of the Department of Energy before he retires from Congress.

The Hanford nuclear reservation has been a signature issue in his 10 terms in the House of Representatives.

He serves a district that extends from Canada to the Oregon state line. But -- as he often says at public meetings -- he can see the Hanford nuclear reservation across the Columbia River from his Pasco home.

He has worked to ensure government bureaucrats understand the expectations of the people of the Tri-City area, sending a steady stream of needling letters to officials in Washington, D.C.

He's fought for Hanford-related spending bills in Congress, helping to ensure that \$2 billion annually in DOE government spending for environmental cleanup keeps flowing.

And he has taken the lead to educate other members of Congress about Hanford's environmental cleanup needs and the nation's obligation to get the work done.

Hastings will focus on preserving Hanford's B Reactor through creation of a new national park as the clock ticks down to his retirement, according to his staff. He'll also continue to push for public access to the top of Rattlesnake Mountain.

And he wants to make sure that DOE is headed down the right path, to ensure that local wishes are respected in the future use of Hanford land and to make sure the cleanup of some of Hanford's worst radioactive waste is accomplished.

Carl Adrian, president of the Tri-City Development Council, said Hastings recognizes that the nation has a moral and legal responsibility to clean up contamination at Hanford left from World War II and the Cold War.

Adrian credits Hastings for reaching across the political aisle to collaborate on Hanford issues with Washington's two Democratic senators, Patty Murray and Maria Cantwell.

Murray acknowledged that collaboration when Hastings announced his retirement. "I am particularly grateful to have been able to work with Doc on ensuring the federal government lives up to its responsibility to clean up Hanford," Murray said.

"I always knew that we had each other's back over the years when it came time to showing either the new Republican or Democrat in the White House that Hanford cleanup demanded their attention and that we were going to hold them accountable," she said.

Even Fred Rumsey, the political committee chairman of the Hanford Atomic Metal Trades Council, gives Hastings credit for working well with Murray to secure steady Hanford budgets.

"It's no secret that I've never been a fan (of Hastings)," Rumsey said. "He hates the union. He's very vocal about it."

Many years Hastings succeeded in getting more Hanford cleanup money approved in the House than the administration requested. However, it's usually Murray who does the heavy lifting, getting larger amounts approved in the Senate.

Hastings' influence and support for the Hanford budget is critical as a conference committee meets to reconcile the House and Senate versions of the DOE budget, said Gary Petersen, TRIDEC vice president of Hanford programs.

But on at least one occasion, Hastings has voted against more money for Hanford.

The largest boost to Hanford cleanup spending was the one-time allocation of \$1.96 billion in 2009 under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Hastings split from Washington's senators on the economic stimulus bill and voted against it, citing its overall cost. He feared it would be used as an excuse to cut future annual budgets at Hanford, he said.

He has long advocated for steady funding for Hanford, fighting deep drops or steep increases. Thousands of workers were hired as part of the stimulus. Thirty months later, when the money was gone, about 2,000 were laid off, including some longtime Hanford workers.

Pushing for tank waste cleanup

Hastings also influenced the Hanford budget in a less obvious way.

In 1998 he used legislation to split some of Hanford's most critical and complex cleanup work into a separate DOE Hanford office -- the Office of River Protection. It is responsible for emptying leak-prone underground tanks and getting the \$12.3 billion vitrification plant built to turn the waste into a stable glass form for disposal.

The split not only focused attention on that work, but created a separate funding stream for it.

Construction on the vitrification plant started in 2002, and since then there have been delays and steep price increases. Work has stopped on key parts of the project to address technical issues that could affect the safe and efficient future operation of the plant, and DOE has said it is at risk of not having the plant at full operation by a court-enforced deadline of 2022.

Hastings would like to leave office with a workable plan in place for the vit plant, said Jessica Gleason, a member of his staff.

He's criticized DOE for a lack of details about plans for the plant and told DOE officials that could jeopardize the project's congressional funding. That's just some of the direction he's given DOE about the vit plant and other projects.

He criticized a move, later reversed, to bypass Hanford management and give more oversight of the vit plant to officials in Washington, D.C. And DOE did not shift money from Hanford to DOE cleanup sites elsewhere amidst budget uncertainty in 2013 after Hastings told DOE that would be "met with my strongest opposition."

He's used his influence to draw attention to and win support for Hanford, persuading House leaders to tour Hanford with him, including a former chairman of the Appropriation Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development.

He also created the bipartisan Nuclear Cleanup Caucus in the House in 2000. The caucus has grown increasingly important as work at some DOE sites around the country has been completed, leaving fewer states with a stake in supporting funding for DOE environmental cleanup. The caucus educates and lobbies other congressional members on DOE environmental cleanup projects and needs.

Last chance for historic park?

Hastings' final months in office are the "last and best" chance to create a Manhattan Project National Historical Park, Petersen said.

"What better legacy? It's huge," Petersen said.

The park is proposed to include not only Hanford's B Reactor, but sites in New Mexico and Tennessee where work was done to create the world's first atomic bombs, helping end World War II.

There will be no one in the House for many years who is likely to have the clout and interest to push national park legislation through to law, Petersen said.

"This is our year," Petersen said. "If he doesn't do it, we're in real trouble."

Hastings has railed against what he calls "the crushing burden of federal debt," and expanding the national park program might not seem like a good fit with his fiscally conservative Republican views.

But if Hanford's B Reactor -- the world's first production-scale nuclear reactor -- is not saved, it will have to be "cocooned" or put in temporary storage at a cost of \$13 million to \$24 million, based on past work at Hanford, according to TRIDEC. Eventually it would need to be demolished. The estimated five-year cost of the park is \$20 million.

Since becoming chairman of the House Natural Resources Committee, Hastings twice has led efforts that resulted in House approval of a Manhattan Project National Park, but the Senate so far has failed to pass a companion bill.

While Hastings waits, he has tried a second tactic. "It's actually brilliant," Petersen said.

A Manhattan Project National Historical Park would include defense sites, and a version of the National Defense Authorization Act has been passed each year for at least the past 50.

Hastings got the creation of the park attached to the 2014 act, which the House approved. However, when the Senate failed to act, a new bill was crafted that failed to include the amendment.

Looking to Hanford's future

Hastings will leave office with plans for the future use of the site uncertain.

One of his recent projects has been pressuring DOE to speed the proposed transfer of 1,641 acres of surplus Hanford land to allow industrial development and help replace jobs lost as Hanford environmental cleanup progresses.

But he's also interested in what he can do on a broader scale to set the stage in terms of life after Hanford cleanup at the 586-square-mile nuclear reservation, Gleason said.

"He wants to make sure that some process is in place, that the land is not just locked up by the federal government into perpetuity," she said. And he does not want Hanford's future dictated by Washington, D.C.

He opposed turning the buffer area around Hanford into the Hanford Reach National Monument in 2000, advocating for a plan that would allow more local control. More recently, Hastings removed Hanford from

a bill that would have locked up future land use decisions by designating parts of Hanford and other sites across the DOE complex as national environmental research projects.

Now he is working with Tri-Cities leaders, his colleagues in Congress and DOE to ensure maximum flexibility and local input as Hanford's future is discussed, his staff said.

He's had a prickly relationship with Mid-Columbia unions.

Appointments with union leaders have been canceled or ignored, Rumsey said.

"He has a poor record of doing the right thing for workers," he said. HAMTC and Hastings butted heads in 2012 about a proposal that union leaders believed would weaken safety standards at Hanford.

Hastings' staff pointed out that he urged the secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services to approve a change in federal requirements in 2009 that allowed far more ill Hanford workers or their survivors to be compensated under the Energy Employees Occupational Illness Compensation Program.

Listening to local government officials near Hanford has been one of Hastings' strengths, said Kennewick Mayor Steve Young. Young also is chairman of the governing board of Hanford Communities, a coalition of Hanford-area local governments, and the secretary of the Energy Communities Alliance, a nationwide coalition of governments near DOE sites.

"We have become the envy of other cities in the DOE process," Young said. "He brought us to the table with the DOE Richland Operations Office and Office of River Protection and headquarters."

Although local leaders can tell DOE what the Tri-City community needs, it's a more powerful message when it's carried to DOE by a congressman, as Hastings has done, he said.

Hastings also has spent time helping local government leaders, many without a strong connection to Hanford, understand DOE issues, such as what the impacts of federal budget sequestration would be on Hanford, Young said.

Many years will be required to achieve the kind of influence Hastings now wields for the Tri-Cities, no matter who wins the 4th Congressional District seat, Petersen said. Multiple terms are required to be given assignments to important committees, like those that influence federal spending, he said.

"It's a loss for Central Washington and the Tri-Cities," Adrian said.

McConnell, Paul and Whitfield Urge DOE to Release

Cleanup Funding for Paducah

Senator Mitch McConnell

February 20, 2014

[LINK](#)

Washington, DC -- Kentucky Senators Mitch McConnell and Rand Paul and Congressman Ed Whitfield (KY-01) in a letter pressed Department of Energy (DOE) Secretary Ernest Moniz to release funding for ongoing cleanup and to expedite contracts for new cleanup activities at the DOE site in Paducah, Kentucky.

In the letter, the lawmakers urged DOE "to move as quickly as possible to release funds appropriated for this purpose in an effort to re-hire Kentuckians who have recently been laid-off and to hire employees to begin new cleanup work."

"In addition to the ongoing cleanup efforts, we urge you to move as quickly as possible to execute the indefinite delivery/indefinite quantity (IDIQ) contract so that necessary work can begin on reclaiming the gaseous diffusion plant," according to the letter. "In the interim, we ask the department to utilize all means available to begin necessary work that may be performed prior to the IDIQ contract's execution. It is vitally important to the Paducah community that DOE continue ongoing cleanup and begin new work in a timely manner to ensure that experienced, highly-skilled workers do not leave the region."

The lawmakers also called on DOE to make full decommissioning and deactivation at the site a priority in the upcoming fiscal year. The McConnell, Paul, and Whitfield letter can be viewed [HERE](#).

Yucca Mountain status? Hearing delves into dumpsite issues, takes pulse of Nevadans

Las Vegas Sun

February 22, 2014

[LINK](#)

Major progress is expected in the coming year toward resolving the outstanding questions and legal challenges surrounding Yucca Mountain's potential as a repository for the country's high-level nuclear waste, members of the state Legislature were told during an interim committee hearing Friday.

During a four-hour hearing, a range of experts and state officials laid out the road map for decisions in the upcoming year that will seriously affect Yucca Mountain's future.

The hearing also laid bare the confusion and tension that still surround the project three decades and \$15 billion after it was first considered, with a contingent of rural county officials and residents urging the state to reverse course and consider the potential economic impact the repository will have. Fully developing the Yucca Mountain site is projected to cost in excess of \$100 billion.

Testifying before the Committee on High-Level Radioactive Waste on Friday, former U.S. Sen. Richard Bryan said there's "not a pot of gold at the end of the nuclear rainbow."

Bryan, chairman of the Nevada Commission on Nuclear Projects, said the state's opposition is about safety of citizens, not money, warning that there are serious concerns that the radioactivity would leak into the water table and there's the possibility of earthquakes hitting the proposed burial tunnels.

Another major concern raised during the hearing is how the nuclear waste would be transported to the proposed repository. Current plans have as many as three trains and two trucks bearing radioactive waste per week traveling through Clark County to reach the site.

But Nye County Commission Chairman Dan Schinhofen urged the state to drop its opposition, letting the licensing process play out and "the science be heard." If storing the waste at Yucca Mountain is unsafe, Schinhofen said the science will prove it out and the license will be rejected.

"What kept coming out was fear and loathing in Las Vegas. We kept hearing all the reasons why it couldn't happen," he said. "I am very concerned that it's safe. But we won't know until we get the safety evaluation reports out and we have a licensing (process) as the law sets forward to do."

Last year, the Nuclear Resources Commission was ordered by a panel of judges from the U.S. District Court of Appeals in Washington, D.C., to restart the licensing application process that could ultimately approve Yucca Mountain's designation.

The first phase of that process is now underway as the NRC begins working to develop a Safety Evaluation Report for the project and compiling a public database of millions of relevant documents pertaining to the licensing hearing.

Those documents are expected to be compiled by the end of the year, but it's unclear whether the agency will have the funding to move on to the second stage of the licensing process, which would involve a trial-type hearing where all of the evidence for and against the project would be presented.

The NRC currently has only about \$13 million to complete the licensing process, an amount Bob Halstead, executive director of the state Agency for Nuclear Projects, estimates will barely cover the first phase. With no additional federal money currently budgeted to the agency, it's possible the licensing process could shut down before going to a hearing, effectively freezing any progress toward turning Yucca Mountain into a repository.

B&W Y-12 rejects same-sex benefits; Pantex contractor changes policy

Frank Munger's Atomic City Underground

February 25, 2014

[LINK](#)

B&W Y-12, the government's managing contractor at the Y-12 nuclear weapons plant, has rejected at least one employee's application to receive benefits for his same-sex spouse. The enrollment attempt came after the employee and his partner were legally married earlier this year outside of Tennessee.

In response to questions, B&W spokeswoman Ellen Boatner said the federal contractor's policy is based, at least in part, on the fact that the state of Tennessee does not recognize same-sex marriages.

"B&W Y-12's health and welfare benefit plans operate under the eligibility definition of opposite sex for spousal dependents under Tennessee law," Boatner said via email. "Tennessee law does not recognize same-sex marriages. The company continues to monitor evolving federal mandates related to Pension and Savings Plans requirements and will amend the Plans as necessary in order for the Plans to remain compliant."

Boatner noted there is "variance" among Department of Energy contractors. In fact, B&W Pantex, the government's managing contractor at the Pantex nuclear weapons plant in Texas, changed its policy in late 2013 to provide full benefits to legally married couples -- regardless of whether they were same-sex or opposite-sex. The Pantex contractor includes two of the same corporate partners -- Babcock & Wilcox and Bechtel National -- as B&W Y-12.

Pantex spokesman Ed Veiga said the contractor simply views it as providing benefits to legally married couples and also working to comply with federal law. The state of Texas does not recognize same-sex marriages.

While Y-12 and Pantex currently have similar contractor organizations, they are apparently destined to have the same contractor. In January 2013, the National Nuclear Security Administration awarded a \$22 billion contract to Consolidated Nuclear Security -- a partnership that includes Bechtel and Lockheed Martin -- for the combined management of Y-12 and Pantex. Implementation of that contract, however, has been on hold for more than a year because of protests filed by losing bidders.

The Government Accountability Office is due to rule on the latest protest, by Nuclear Production Partners (a team headed by Babcock & Wilcox), by the end of this week.

Jason Bohne, spokesman for Bechtel and CNS, declined to say what policy Consolidated Nuclear Security would implement on benefits for same-sex couples.

"Details of the CNS benefits plan will be finalized and communicated during contract transition," Bohne said by email. "Until then, we don't have any comment on what the benefits plan may or may not include."

There are multiple policies in effect in the Oak Ridge federal complex.

Direct federal employees who work for DOE or NNSA are covered by the

guidance issued last July by the federal government's Office of Personnel Management.

It noted:

"Section 3 of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) provided that, when used in a Federal law, the term 'marriage' would mean only a legal union between one man and one woman as husband and wife, and that the term 'spouse' referred only to a person of the opposite sex who is a husband or a wife. Because of DOMA, the Federal government has been prohibited from recognizing the legal marriages of same-sex couples for purposes of Federal benefit programs.

"On June 26, 2013, the Supreme Court ruled that Section 3 of DOMA is unconstitutional. As a result of this decision, the United States Office of Personnel Management is now able to extend benefits to legally married same-sex spouses of Federal employees and annuitants. For purposes of benefits coverage, you must follow the same procedures you currently follow when enrolling an opposite-sex spouse or child(ren) of an opposite-sex marriage."

Department of Energy contractors in Oak Ridge have a range of policies.

UT-Battelle, which manages Oak Ridge National Laboratory, provides benefits for same-sex couples but the policy is not based on marriage. "Beginning in January 2013, non-married, same-sex domestic partners were eligible to enroll in UT-Battelle's medical and dental plans," spokesman David Keim said. "Dependents of domestic partners are not eligible for coverage." Keim added, "We have fewer than 10 participants."

URS-CH2M Oak Ridge (UCOR), DOE's environmental cleanup manager in Oak Ridge, does not provide coverage for same-sex couples. Communications chief Allen Schubert said in response to questions, "UCOR benefit plans currently do not recognize same-sex couples as 'married,' thus, spouses of such employees do not meet eligibility requirements as a 'legal' spouse."

Oak Ridge Associated Universities, which manages DOE's Oak Ridge Institute for Science and Education, provides full benefits to married couples - regardless of same-sex or opposite-sex. "If a couple is legally married, ORAU does offer benefits to all family members," ORAU spokeswoman Pam Bonee said. "At the present time, we do not offer benefits to domestic partners no matter what the situation."

Bonee said ORAU began implementing that policy in June 2013.