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Editorial: Hanford site deserves historical park status

The Spokesman-Review
December 5, 2014

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The long-running push to establish a Manhattan Project Historical National Park is reaching a critical juncture, with one of the main advocates soon leaving Congress.

Rep. Doc Hastings, chairman of the House Natural Resources Committee, has been the leading proponent in that chamber, but he's retiring at the end of this congressional term. Early this year, Hastings was able to add language that would create the park to the House Defense Authorization bill. The park would commemorate the world's first large-scale nuclear reactor at the Hanford Nuclear

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Reservation. U.S. Sen. Maria Cantwell was able to accomplish the same with the Senate version.

The park is part of a large package of public-lands measures appended to the defense bill, including the expansion of the Alpine Lakes Wilderness east of Seattle, and the adoption of "wild and scenic" designations for the Pratt River and the Middle Fork of the Snoqualmie River. The House approved the defense bill Thursday; the Senate is expected to vote on it next week.

There is some resistance. Rep. Tom Coburn, R-Okla., has objected to unrelated matters being added to the defense bill, saying they should be considered as stand-alone measures. That would be ideal, but getting Congress to pass anything these days has become nearly impossible. The last public-lands bill was passed in 2009. So, in this era of gridlock, the strategy is to attach proposed legislation to must-pass bills.

The prospect of a national park at Hanford is particularly exciting (and it's certainly defense-related). We supported the idea three years ago, when it was promoted by then-Interior Secretary Ken Salazar after he toured the historic B Reactor. As he said at the time, "We have not yet done a good enough job of telling the story of World War II and the nuclear era born out of the war."

The story itself is remarkable. Residents of small towns were told to clear out, and workers were brought in to construct a mystery facility. Amazingly, this was all kept secret, and B Reactor was built in an astounding 13 months.

It takes longer than that just to finish the permitting on big projects these days. But the country was in a race to produce a weapon that would end World War II, with Hanford producing the necessary plutonium. In 1945, the nuclear age was born, and it has changed the world forever.

B Reactor is currently designated a National Historic Landmark, but historic park status would increase tourism-related amenities and guarantee that it be preserved. Other Manhattan Project sites, such as Los Alamos, N.M., and Oak Ridge, Tenn., would also gain the designation. Along with learning important history lessons, visitors would gain an appreciation for the long-term cleanup needed at these nuclear facilities. This, in turn, could build more support in Congress for the necessary funding.

Our country has wisely preserved for posterity such sites as Independence Hall and Valley Forge. The history-altering sites of the Manhattan Project also merit remembrance.

Bill would restore proposed Hanford budget cut

Yakima Herald

December 12, 2014

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RICHLAND -- A proposed cut to the Department of Energy's Hanford Richland Operations Office would be restored under a compromise federal spending bill released Tuesday night, according to the staff of Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash.

"The funding secured in this bill is a critical win for Hanford and our entire state," Murray said in a statement.

The omnibus spending bill would increase the budget for Hanford this year by almost \$70 million above the request by the Obama administration, for a total budget of almost \$2.2 billion.

"For the omnibus to get this far forward with positive news is just a testament for Patty Murray," said Gary Petersen, vice president of Hanford programs for the Tri-City Development Council.

The House and Senate still must vote on the bill, but Murray's staff said chances are good that it will pass.

The nation now is operating under temporary spending legislation after budgets were not approved before the Oct. 1 start of the current federal fiscal year.

The current continuing resolution that allows the federal government to operate expires today. But another short-term funding bill may be passed until the House and Senate can vote before the end of the current session on the new omnibus spending bill, which includes money for most federal agencies.

The compromise bill includes \$941 million for the Department of Energy's Hanford Richland Operations Office, an increase of \$93 million over the administration's fiscal 2015 budget request.

The office is responsible for all Hanford cleanup work except for managing radioactive waste in underground tanks and the vitrification plant being built to treat the waste.

The Hanford Office of River Protection, which is responsible for that work, would receive \$1.2 billion for that work, a decrease of \$23 million from the administration's budget request.

However, that would match the current spending level at the Office of River Protection.

The omnibus spending bill is possible because of the bipartisan budget deal that Murray reached last December with Rep. Paul Ryan, the Republican chairman of the House budget committee.

The deal prevented another government shutdown and restored certainty to the federal budget process. Murray also fought to restore funding proposed to be cut at Hanford

"I am so proud that this bill restores those critical investments," Murray said. "I have made it clear that I expect the federal government to meet its legal obligations and milestones at defense environmental cleanup sites, including Hanford."

Dollar amounts in the bill include: \$544 million for central Hanford cleanup; \$378 million for cleanup along the Columbia River and some related work; \$20 million for community and regulatory support; \$667 million for the vitrification plant and \$545 million for the tank farms

Rep. Fleischmann To Chair Nuclear Cleanup Caucus

The Chattanooga
December 9, 2014

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At a press conference on Tuesday, Congressman Chuck Fleischmann announced he will lead the Nuclear Cleanup Caucus. The caucus is comprised of a group of lawmakers who have Department of Energy cleanup sites in their districts. Rep. Fleischmann is taking over for Rep. Doc Hastings (R-WA) who is retiring at the end of this term.

"It is a great honor to serve as chairman of this important caucus," Rep. Fleischmann said after the press conference. "It is an absolute necessity that we ensure the success of our nuclear cleanup missions, not only in East Tennessee, but at all cleanup sites throughout our nation. I am excited to lead this bipartisan group of legislators from across the country and look forward to the work ahead."

"From my time at Oak Ridge, I know firsthand how passionate and knowledgeable Congressman Fleischmann is about the nuclear cleanup mission," said Mark Whitney, the acting assistant secretary for the U.S. Department of Energy's Office of Environmental Management. "His deep understanding of the Office of Environmental Management's mission and challenges make him an effective advocate as he leads the Cleanup Caucus into the future."

Fines at New Mexico WIPP plant yet to impact SRS

Aiken Standard
December 10, 2014

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The Energy Department currently is facing a \$54 million lawsuit regarding incidents at a New Mexico isolation plant, but Savannah River Site officials verified that the suit has not impacted the Site's schedule to send future shipments of waste to the plant.

The state of New Mexico levied more than \$54 million in penalties against the Department of Energy for numerous violations at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant, known as WIPP, in Carlsbad, New Mexico. Operations at the WIPP are on hold after 22 workers were exposed to radiation during a Feb. 14 incident.

New Mexico accused the Los Alamos National Laboratory of mixing incompatible waste, treating hazardous waste without a permit and failing to notify regulators about changes in the way waste was being handled.

"New Mexico does not need to choose between fulfilling the laboratory's mission and protecting the environment," Ryan Flynn, state environment secretary, said in a letter to Los Alamos officials. "DOE now has an opportunity to learn from these mistakes and implement meaningful corrective actions that will ensure the long-term viability of the Los Alamos National Laboratory."

Reports surfaced in October that the WIPP may stay closed up until 2016. Still, nationwide and local efforts are in the works to continue sending shipments of

waste to the site. The WIPP takes in shipments of transuranic waste, solid waste consisting of clothing, tools, rags, residues, debris and other items contaminated with plutonium - including shipments from the Savannah River Site.

DOE spokesman Jim Giusti said the Savannah River Site has not received any new direction on its shipments. In 2001, SRS began shipping more than 15,000 cubic meters of the waste to the WIPP.

Reactions to the DOE getting fined

Current Argus

December 10, 2014

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CARLSBAD>> An abnormal odor was detected Thursday by four waste handling technicians at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant, according to an update released Tuesday.

The workers were performing surface temperature measurements on the transuranic waste containers when they began smelling a "cleaner-like scent," a WIPP update said.

This odor detection occurred two days before it was made public that the Department of Energy was fined over \$54 million after multiple investigation reports were released showing that the Los Alamos National Laboratory and the WIPP had been in violation of multiple permits.

"This is why they need to be total transparent when these things happened," said John Heaton, chairman of the Carlsbad mayor's nuclear task force.

The odor was described to be like a cleaning solution that was similar to what has been detected before when opening shipping containers during routine waste operations at WIPP.

The release said that workers stopped work and notified their supervisors before leaving the area.

After testing the area it was determined that no abnormal radiological or chemical conditions were detected, but periodic surveillance of the area and the workers, who briefly complained of nausea and dizziness, will be performed, the release said.

When asked about the fines, WIPP officials were unable to give updates or comment about the current situation.

U.S. Sen. Mark Udall said in a news conference Tuesday that he stood by the state's decision to fine the Department of Energy.

"WIPP and LANL are a vital part of New Mexico's economy and our national security, and with such high stakes, there is no room for error or denial. I am very disappointed with what's happened," Udall said.

Udall went on to say that the fines should not come out of any DOE cleanup activities, and that those responsible for these mistakes should not be given any

bonuses or rewards.

U.S. Sen. Martin Heinrich also agreed that the fines were necessary and that the fines should not put any cleanup activities at risk.

"Collaboration between the Department of Energy, regulators, WIPP and the community will be critical. The safety and health of our workers and community is of the utmost importance," Heinrich said in a news release.

On Tuesday, the Department of Energy did not add any information to Saturday's statement.

"The Department of Energy and its contractors self-identified and self-disclosed non-compliance with the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act to the New Mexico Environment Department," a Department of Energy spokesman said Saturday. "We continue to actively address these issues and are firmly committed to the safe, compliant and effective remediation of all our legacy wastes and to recovering Waste Isolation Pilot Plant operations as safely and expeditiously as possible."

Investigators are still looking into what led to the radiation release at WIPP. The findings will decide whether more penalties or actions are necessary, state officials have said.

DOE Announces \$12.5B in Loans for Advanced Nuclear

GreenTechMedia

December 10, 2014

[LINK](#)

The U.S. Department of Energy issued a loan guarantee solicitation for \$12.5 billion on Wednesday for innovative nuclear energy projects.

The solicitation comes on top of \$8 billion for advanced fossil energy projects announced last December, \$4 billion for renewables issued earlier this year and \$6.5 billion for two nuclear reactors in February, the first new nuclear to be built in the U.S. in about 30 years.

"With \$40 billion of loan guarantee authority available to advance our all-of-the-above energy strategy, the Department's Loan Programs Office has an opportunity to replicate its past successes, supporting innovative clean energy technologies that bring the U.S. closer to a low-carbon future," said DOE Secretary Ernest Moniz in a statement.

The solicitation this week is for eligible projects that employ "new or significantly improved technology as compared to commercial technology in service in the United States."

On the front end of the nuclear fuel cycle, there are \$2 billion for projects that provide innovation in the areas of uranium conversion, uranium enrichment or nuclear fuel fabrication.

The rest of the money will go to nuclear power facilities, including state-of-the-art design reactors, small modular reactors that are 300 megawatts or smaller, and

upgrades to make plants more efficient or for improvements that would allow reactors to continue operating.

The U.S. Energy Information Administration recently reported that nearly all U.S. nuclear plants would require a life extension beyond 60 years to operate beyond 2050.

Although Secretary Moniz has been touting small modular reactors in recent years, it was a traditional design that received millions of dollars in DOE support earlier this year.

The Alvin W. Vogtle Electric Generating Plant in Georgia will house a pair of 1,100-megawatt Westinghouse AP1000 third-generation pressurized water reactors. The technology is not that different from what has been built in decades past. However, if there were a failure similar to what happened at Fukushima, human intervention would not be required to shut down a reactor.

The potential projects will have to be under the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's licensing review, at least in the pre-application phase. That could help to solve some aspects of the chicken-and-egg problem that has so far delayed investment in small modular reactors (SMRs) in the U.S.

Earlier this year, Westinghouse scaled back work on its 225-megawatt small modular reactors as it awaits design certification clarity from regulators. If a significant portion of the money goes to SMRs, it could be a big boost. The industry has already received about \$450 million from the DOE, which thinks the smaller reactors can be built more cheaply and rapidly, and with superior safety measures.

The solicitation suggests that more innovative applications, rather than just tweaks to existing nuclear technology, are what the DOE is looking for. "DOE will look favorably on Eligible Projects that will have a catalytic effect on the commercial deployment of future Advanced Nuclear Energy Projects," the solicitation states.

The first deadline for Part 1 applications is March 18, 2015, followed by a series of rolling deadlines approximately every six months.

Reps. Perlmutter, Polis Successfully Include Important Amendment for Rocky Flats Workers in NDAA

Press Release

December 11, 2014

WASHINGTON D.C. - U.S. Rep. Ed Perlmutter (CO-07) and U.S. Rep. Jared Polis (CO-02) applaud the inclusion of an important amendment in the passage of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2015 (NDAA). The bipartisan amendment, also co-authored with Rep. Ed Whitfield (KY-01) and spearheaded in the Senate by Senator Mark Udall, will create an independent advisory board to increase transparency and ensure Cold War Patriots' benefits applications are reviewed accurately and expeditiously.

During the Cold War, approximately 600,000 workers were employed at more than 380 U.S. atomic weapons program facilities throughout the country. Many

of these Cold War Patriots were unknowingly exposed to radioactive and toxic substances at work. As a direct result of their work for the U.S. government, some atomic weapons program workers have developed cancers and other diseases. Unfortunately, due to bureaucratic hurdles and delays, many Cold War Patriots still have not received the benefits they deserve to care for the illnesses they contracted as a result of their work. This includes the workers of Rocky Flats, a former nuclear trigger production facility located in Jefferson County, part of Rep. Perlmutter's 7th Congressional District.

"Not only do we owe our Cold War Patriots a great debt of gratitude for their service to our country, we have a duty to ensure these nuclear weapons workers are given the benefits they deserve to care for their work-related illnesses," said Rep. Perlmutter. "This advisory board is an important step in adding transparency and accountability to decisions made affecting workers' compensation and access to benefits."

"Too many men and women who dedicated years of their life serving their country during the Cold War have faced inexcusable delays in getting medical treatment and benefits," said Rep. Polis. "I am thrilled that the amendment I offered with Reps. Perlmutter and Whitfield to eliminate this uncertainty and improve transparency for our Cold War patriots was included in the final NDAA text. I will continue to fight tirelessly to ensure that this amendment becomes law so we can eliminate the red tape and bureaucracy that has frustrated these employees, and me, for too long."

In 2000, Congress acted to provide health care and benefits to these workers by passing the Energy Employees Occupational Illness Compensation Program Act (EEOICPA). Unfortunately, implementation of EEOICPA was plagued by delays. The amendment would create an independent advisory board under Part E of the program providing compensation and medical benefits for workers exposed to toxic substances. The advisory board would review the Site Exposure Matrix and other methods currently used by Department of Labor claims examiners to determine causation of medical ailments. The advisory board was recently recommended by the Government Accountability Office and the Institute of Medicine.

Hastings pushes DOE for tank answers

Tri-City Herald

December 11, 2014

[LINK](#)

Retiring Rep. Doc Hastings, R-Wash., is pressing the Department of Energy for more information on the cost and implications of building more storage tanks at the Hanford nuclear reservation.

Hastings may not get an answer to the letter he sent to DOE before he retires at the end of the month. But his staff said there was value in having the possibility of new storage tanks discussed publicly and getting answers to questions on the record.

The state of Washington wants DOE to add 4 million gallons of new storage tank capacity, with the possibility of later requiring even more capacity, according to documents filed in federal court as the two parties argue over how to amend a

court-enforced consent decree.

"The real solution to Hanford tank waste is not simply transferring waste from one storage tank into another storage tank -- but rather retrieving and treating the waste so that it can be immobilized and properly disposed of in its final form," Hastings wrote in a letter to Mark Whitney, acting assistant secretary of the DOE Office of Environmental Management.

Initiatives that distract focus and funds from getting waste now stored in underground tanks treated for disposal at the Hanford vitrification plant must be very carefully considered, Hastings said.

Hanford workers are transferring waste from 149 leak-prone single-shell tanks to 28 newer double-shell tanks to be stored until the waste can be treated at the vitrification plant. But the oldest double-shell tank is scheduled to be emptied because it has an interior leak, and double-shell tanks are nearing capacity with work on the vitrification plant behind schedule.

DOE already has said in federal court documents that new tanks to hold 12 million gallons of waste would cost \$1 billion.

Hastings is asking DOE how much the initial 4 million gallons of tank capacity requested by the state would cost and how long it would take to construct, license and begin using the tanks. He also wants to know, given typical Hanford budgets, what other work at Hanford or elsewhere at DOE cleanup sites might be delayed or stopped to focus time and resources on new Hanford storage tanks.

"Hanford cleanup proposals cannot be considered in a vacuum, without complete understanding of the implications on all ongoing work," Hastings said.

Safety is a concern, he indicated in the letter. He asked about the possible risks to workers and the environment associated with pumping waste into possible new storage tanks.

He questioned whether DOE has considered possible technologies for removing cesium and other radioactive isotopes from its existing double-shell tanks to create more usable space.

Other questions covered work to increase the current tank storage capacity available in an emergency and a new facility under consideration, the proposed Tank Waste Characterization Facility, to blend, sample and stage waste and do some pretreatment of waste before it is sent to the vitrification plant.

"I recognize the sensitive nature of legal negotiations, but believe that it is incumbent upon all of us to never lose sight of the fact that the legacy of our nation's defense cleanup is funded by the American taxpayers," he said.

Decisions on matters such as whether to build more storage tanks should not be made solely by lawyers behind closed doors, he said.

Although Hastings likely will be retired before DOE answers the letter, he sent a copy of the letter to Dan Newhouse, who will take Hastings' place in Congress, plus Rep. Mike Simpson, chairman of the House Energy and Water Development

Appropriations Subcommittee.

Group pitching nuclear plant in southeastern Idaho

Idaho State Journal

December 10, 2014

[LINK](#)

Idaho Falls, Idaho - An investment group is pitching a plan to build a commercial nuclear power plant in southeastern Idaho near the Idaho National Laboratory.

The Post Register reports that Twin Buttes Enterprises LLC presented its idea to the Butte County Commission on Monday.

"Butte County's been comfortable for decades with nuclear energy because of the INL site," said Commission Chairman Seth Beal, referring to the federal nuclear research facility. "So, it's not foreign to us, but it's difficult to really evaluate anything yet. It's just an offering."

He said a letter will be drafted showing the support for nuclear power in the county, but "we can't support any project, because right now, there isn't one."

Twin Buttes was approved for a certificate of organization by the Idaho Secretary of State on Nov. 21. Bob Skinner, a former INL executive now with Twin Buttes, said the group plans to start contacting potential nuclear plant developers next year.

Other members of Twin Buttes, the group said, are local real estate agent Reed Nord, Idaho Falls engineer Ted Sorensen, and Christopher Hope, who is identified as having international commercial nuclear power plant experience.

There are about eight investors in all, Skinner said, and they've been working informally on the idea for a nuclear plant for more than three years.

The plan involves 1,840 acres owned by the Pancheri family east of Howe that is flanked by the INL on two sides. Skinner said the group has an option on the land to build a nuclear power plant.

Skinner said the group has examined water access and completed environmental and seismic background research. Potential economic effects on Butte County have also been examined, he said.

"We recognize it's just the first step in them trying to move forward," Beal said. "It's pretty preliminary."

Wash. state task force will continue look at small modular nuclear reactors

Tri-City Herald

December 4, 2014

[LINK](#)

A Washington state nuclear energy task force focused on small modular reactors has voted to extend its work into 2015 rather than making a recommendation and disbanding this month as planned.

The Washington Joint Select Task Force on Nuclear Energy still has unanswered questions members said as they met for their final scheduled meeting this week in Olympia.

The state has more work to do if lawmakers hope to take advantage of the clean energy and economic-development potential nuclear power provides, said Sen. Sharon Brown, R-Kennewick, after the meeting.

The nuclear-study group was given until Dec. 15 to examine whether increased nuclear power production is a viable, cost-effective means of further reducing Washington's use of carbon-emitting fossil fuels.

The task force, which is bipartisan and includes state House and Senate members, will continue to work informally while seeking formal authorization of the extension during the upcoming session.

Small modular nuclear reactors have great potential not only to provide affordable, clean energy to the state, but also to provide jobs for the people of the Tri-Cities, Brown said.

She secured a \$500,000 state grant last year for the Tri-City Development Council to study the possible benefits of installing a small reactor at Hanford.

The study concluded that \$300 million might be saved by putting one of the reactors at Energy Northwest's never-completed WNP-1 reactor site, which is on leased Hanford land. Electricity produced might be used to replace 45,000 gallons of diesel a day for heat to glassify waste at the Hanford vitrification plant under construction.

However, the ultimate goal of Tri-City economic leaders is to become a site to assemble small modular reactors for shipment around the world, including to Asia.

"Is Washington going to be a leader or a follower when it comes to supporting emerging technologies?" Brown asked. "We have the resources available to us right here in our state. However, other states are quickly working to develop their assets."

The task force met twice in Olympia and also traveled to Pasco for a hearing and toured NuScale Power in Corvallis, Ore., this year. NuScale is developing a 50-megawatt nuclear reactor that that could be transported and set up for operation at sites where one or more are needed.

"We pretty much ran through this process" and the task force is not prepared to make a solid recommendation, said Rep. Jake Fey, D-Tacoma. It needs to carefully and deliberately examine the economic development potential for the Tri-Cities, he said.

Questions about the lifecycle costs of the small reactors have not been answered,

said Sen. John McCoy, D-Tulalip. He also would be more comfortable about making a recommendation if the nation had a repository for used nuclear fuel, he said.

Other issues the task force could continue to look at next year include the potential for manufacturing reactors or components in the state, the use of existing assets around the state and the feasibility and cost effectiveness of the technology.

