

Collaborative effort secures \$200 million for cleanup project

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Local officials are pleased with the level of federal funding next year for cleanup efforts at the U.S. Department of Energy's Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant and the collaboration that brought it about.

The end-of-year spending bill approved by Congress Friday and signed into law by President Barack Obama included nearly \$200 million for continued decontamination and decommissioning of the former uranium enrichment operation at the plant.

The amount represents some \$31 million more than was included in the president's fiscal 2016 budget request and is close to the \$207 million funding level for fiscal '15.

"Kentucky's federal delegation has worked hard for us in getting the additional funding," said Paducah Mayor Gayle Kaler, speaking of Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, Sen. Rand Paul and U.S. Rep. Ed Whitfield. "I think our success in this community is based on our relationship building in Washington (with those officials) and setting up those meetings with DOE."

McCracken County Judge-Executive Bob Leeper said, "I appreciate our federal delegation's effort to secure a sustainable level of funding for cleanup at the DOE site. This consistent level of funding will dramatically improve our ability to budget and plan. We are pleased that the results achieved by efforts coordinated through local and federal officials will give area workers and businesses confidence as we move forward."

Part of the relationship building the mayor referred to is the Paducah Area Chamber of Commerce's annual "D.C. Fly-In." A contingent of local officials and business leaders take a unified message to Washington and meet with elected representatives, their staffs, and officials with the DOE and its main contractor at the plant, Fluor Federal Services.

"We are pleased that the United States House and Senate have passed a spending bill that provides vital funding for the Paducah DOE deactivation project," said David Marventano, senior vice president of government relations for Fluor Corporation. "I am confident our project team in Paducah will work with DOE to put these dollars to work."

According to Sandra Wilson, chamber president, the funding "provides for more work to be done and also, we hope, ensures the increased employment level (about 1,600 jobs) at the site. We will continue to push for longer-term contracts and extensions so those companies and employees have more job security."

Scott Darnell is president/CEO of Paducah Economic Development, which also oversees the operation of the Paducah Area Community Reuse Organization.

"We have recognized, with the partnerships of Fluor and the other contractors at the site, our small business efforts, employment opportunities, and other opportunities can be maximized because of the great collaborative efforts on this project," Darnell said. "This was a great year for Paducah/McCracken County because of the leadership and commitment by many, especially Fluor, Swift & Staley, and the hard-working employees at the plant."

Work has already begun on the 2017 budget, according to Darnell, "and this will remain a priority to ensure the responsible cleanup of the site moves forward."