



# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

### Statement of Congressman Doc Hastings before the Appropriations Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development U.S. House of Representatives April 6, 2006

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Visclosky, and members of the Committee, I appreciate you holding this hearing today and welcome your dedication to getting answers on the Department of Energy's management of the Waste Treatment Plant project at the Hanford nuclear cleanup site in Washington state.

It is critical that this Committee, the Congress, and the community and State that I represent understand what has happened with this project to date and what DOE intends to do from this point forward. Tough questions are warranted and direct answers are deserved.

DOE has a moral and legal responsibility to cleanup the federal government's former defense nuclear sites – and to get the job done in a safe, efficient and timely manner. Regrettably, DOE's track record has not always lived up to this standard.

DOE must be held to account and they must set a path forward for the Waste Treatment Plant that we can have confidence in, and is accurate and achievable.

While in today's world there is often competition among communities and states to become the home of large federal projects and to protect local military installations from closure, Washington state did not choose to become home to Hanford.

In 1942, the federal government selected Hanford as the "perfect" Manhattan Project site for plutonium production because it was remote, safely inland, sparsely populated, a flat and arid desert landscape, had a dependable source of power from Grand Coulee Dam, and an abundant supply of water from the Columbia River.

Once the Hanford site was selected, the federal government gave farm families and several small towns just 30 days to abandon their homes and land. In total secrecy, tens of thousands of workers labored to build a first-of-its-kind facility to produce the plutonium needed to build an atomic bomb. Let us not forget, the project was a success – and forty years of nuclear production at Hanford helped end World War II and helped to end the Cold War.

The price of success was high. Today, Hanford is without question the single largest environmental cleanup site in the nation. The volumes of waste and level of environmental contamination can be difficult to fathom. With its 586 square miles, Hanford contains approximately:

- 500 contaminated facilities and buildings, including 9 nuclear reactors;
- 25 million cubic feet of buried or stored solid wastes;
- 270 billion gallons of groundwater contaminated above drinking water standards;
- 2,300 tons of spent nuclear fuel;
- 12 tons of plutonium, and to put this into perspective only a few kilograms are needed to produce a nuclear weapon;
- and, 177 underground storage tanks containing over 50 million gallons of radioactive liquid and sludge wastes.

The Waste Treatment Plant is being built to safely treat millions of gallons of wastes from these aging and degraded underground tanks. Highly radioactive liquid and sludge wastes will be transformed through the vitrification process into solid, stable glass for safe, long-term storage. The challenge is huge because the risks posed by the aging storage tanks are very real. While some tanks are double-shelled, most are only single-shelled and decades past their design life. At least one million gallons of waste has leaked from the tanks into the surrounding soil.

With this level of environmental contamination and risks to public health and safety, the interest of local residents and the State of Washington in the Waste Treatment Plant and cleanup of Hanford is justifiably intense.

Cleanup at Hanford, and other sites across the nation, is not optional. Past actions of the federal government created the current conditions at Hanford, and the people of Washington state and the surrounding communities have every right to expect the government to clean it up. It's a commitment the Department of Energy must uphold.

To date, the State of Washington has been understanding as DOE works to correct problems, address challenges and set a path forward. The State of Washington believes in the Waste Treatment Plant technology, and is intent upon seeing the over fifty million gallons of liquid wastes cleaned from the underground tanks and treated into a safe, stable glass form.

No one is more invested than the local community in making certain that the Waste Treatment Plant will function, and function safely. When this nuclear waste is in your backyard – and I can literally see Hanford out my kitchen window – you want to make absolutely certain that DOE is doing its job, but most importantly, that it is doing its job right.

Again, I thank the Committee for holding this hearing, for your interest in the cleanup of Hanford, and for the seriousness with which you approach your oversight responsibilities.