

Congressman Doc Hastings

Testimony on National Historic Landmark Designation for Hanford's B Reactor

National Park System Advisory Board

July 22, 2008

I have long-sought a meeting of the full National Park System Advisory Board so that the National Historic Landmark proposal for the Hanford site's historic B Reactor can be considered. In December, I was able to testify in person at the Landmarks Committee meeting. As you know, that meeting resulted in a unanimous recommendation to grant National Historic Landmark status to the B Reactor. I am strongly supportive of this proposal, and I hope that you will agree that the B Reactor is worthy of this designation.

Hanford's nuclear history began in the 1940's and played a pivotal role in our nation's defense for more than 40 years. As part of the Manhattan Project – the World War II effort to develop and construct the first atomic bomb – the work done at Hanford was an integral part of ending World War II. Later, nuclear weapons production at Hanford helped provide the nuclear deterrence to win the Cold War and bring an end to the Soviet Union.

The B Reactor was a key part of Hanford's nuclear production success. Only months after Enrico Fermi first demonstrated that a controlled nuclear reaction was possible, ground was broken on the B Reactor – which became the world's first full-scale plutonium production reactor. As part of the Manhattan Project, the B Reactor produced the plutonium for the first ever manmade nuclear explosion and later produced the plutonium for the bomb that helped end World War II.

Touring B Reactor is like stepping back into the 1940's, because it has been left largely intact. For those who didn't live through World War II – the B Reactor tells the story of the time and of the workforce that contributed to our nation's defense for so many years. By preserving B Reactor, we will have an irreplaceable teaching tool for future generations

For years I have been working to ensure that B Reactor's history is remembered. In 2003 I authored a law that directed the National Park Service to consider preservation options. This study is expected to be completed this year. A National Historic Landmark designation for B Reactor would be an additional step to protect this structure as the Department of Energy and National Park Service consider long term preservation options.

Fortunately, because of past decisions of the National Park System Advisory Board many historic Manhattan Project sites already have the recognition that comes with a National Historic Landmark designation. Today, Americans can visit the site of the first self-

sustaining nuclear reaction at the National Historic Landmark in Cook County Illinois, see first-hand the smaller precursor to the B Reactor at the X-10 Reactor National Historic Landmark in Oak Ridge Tennessee, tour the Los Alamos Scientific Laboratory National Historic Landmark in New Mexico, visit the National Historic Landmark of Gilman Hall at Berkeley where plutonium was first discovered, and see the National Historic Landmark Trinity Site in New Mexico.

These sites are all important, but alone they do not tell the complete story of the Manhattan Project. Hanford was where all the scientific knowledge developed by the Manhattan Project was ultimately implemented. At Hanford, the B Reactor proved that America had passed the point of research into nuclear technology and had officially entered the nuclear age. If we are to tell the story of the Manhattan Project in its entirety to future generations, Hanford's B Reactor deserves this federal recognition.

B Reactor's national significance has long been recognized by those in the nearby Tri-Cities community. With local support, B Reactor was declared a Civil Engineering Landmark in 1968 and it was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1992.

The local community has worked hard over the years to support recognition of B Reactor, and to prevent its demolition. In fact, at the end of the Cold War – when B Reactor faced the possibility of closure – the B Reactor Museum Association was formed to preserve the history of reactor. Local groups such as the Tri-City Industrial Development Council, the Tri-Cities Visitor & Convention Bureau, the Hanford Communities, and others lent their support and persuaded leaders across Washington state to support B Reactor preservation.

Recognizing the B Reactor as a National Historic Landmark has my support as well as the support of the Tri-Cities community. We believe the B Reactor deserves to be preserved, and the stories of the workers should be retold for generations to come. Thank you for your consideration of this designation.