

Bush budget's impact on state blasted

Democrats say president's spending plan cuts programs New Yorkers rely heavily upon

By Doug Turner - NEWS WASHINGTON BUREAU

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WASHINGTON — Democrats on Monday blasted President Bush's final budget message for proposing to cut programs New Yorkers heavily rely on — such as health care, home energy assistance and housing aid — in order to pay for the Iraq War and his tax cuts.

Facing a tough election, Republicans on the House and Senate budget committees offered only muted support for the 2009 spending plan, saying it is important to restrain spending.

Sen. Charles E. Schumer, D-N.Y., said, "Now is not the time to give Western New Yorkers the cold shoulder."

Schumer said the White House would eliminate federal aid to cities and states for jailing illegal immigrants who commit crimes and kill funding for localities to help them prosecute sex offenders.

Gov. Eliot L. Spitzer called the White House budget's proposal to cut funding for the state's hospitals and nursing homes by \$10 billion over five years "irresponsible."

Nationally, Schumer said, the administration plans to cut funding for Medicare by \$178 billion and Medicaid by \$18 billion over 5 years.

The lion's share of these cuts will come out of health care providers such as hospitals, nursing homes, home care and hospice. Hospitals have been operating at a loss for nine years, he said.

Majority Democratic budget chairmen in the House and Senate suggested it is dead on arrival. But Rep. Brian Higgins, D-Buffalo, warned, "The document still is the blueprint for what Congress does in its appropriations [spending] bills."

"Remember," Higgins said, "the president still has the veto power and works it to advantage when there are profound differences between what the Senate and House want."

One example of this process is the West Valley Demonstration project. The president recommended spending \$58 million for the nuclear cleanup in Cattaraugus County. Rep. John R. "Randy" Kuhl Jr., R-Hammondsport, recommended an increase, but Democratic appropriators used the White House plan to cut West Valley back to \$58 million.

Higgins lamented the budget's 13 percent cuts in highway and bridge spending "at a time we ought to be investing more on our infrastructure."

"The deficit is still going to be \$400 billion, and we still don't have the full cost of the war in it," Higgins said.

Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton, D-N.Y., said the president's plan freezes funding for the National Institutes of Health and zeroes out the national children's (health) study, kills the Preventive Care Block Grant and Area Health Education Centers.

Clinton said the president would impose a 22 percent cut in Low-Income Home Energy Assistance, with a \$79 million impact on New Yorkers.

The president also wants to cut community development block grants for New Yorkers by \$73 million and cut Amtrak by more than \$570 million.

Rep Louise M. Slaughter, D-Fairport, said the budget is "fiscally and morally irresponsible, and demonstrates a failure to lead."

She said it "is just more of the same from a president who believes that defense spending, the war in Iraq and tax cuts for the rich should come at the expense of fiscal responsibility, education, health care and a host of other important issues."

Slaughter said it cuts \$376 million from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevent, kills grants for graduate medical education and levels funding at the National Institutes of Health at \$29 billion.

The bipartisan National Conference of State Legislatures said the budget continues the Bush administration's tendency to shift costs to the states, particularly unfunded mandates.

"The most egregious example," said the NCSL, "is the minimal funding offered for REAL ID," the new federal requirements for state-issued driver's licenses.

"The Department of Homeland Security estimates the costs of Real ID to be at least \$4 billion over five years, while the administration proposes only \$110 million" for the 2009 fiscal year.

New York wants to offer a Real ID license as an alternative to a passport needed to re-enter the U.S. from Canada after June 1, 2009.

Customs and Border Protection inspectors at the Canadian border now burdened with having to verify passports and driver's licenses for visitors and returning U.S. citizens got some bad news in the budget.

Coleen M. Kelly, president of the National Treasury Employees Union, which represents many inspectors, said the budget would repeal newly enacted enhanced retirement benefits for CPB personnel and eliminate \$50 million in funding from current law.

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New West Valley decommissioning plan surfaces

■ Reaction mixed on idea that was a year in the making

By RICK MILLER
OLEAN TIMES HERALD

ASHFORD HOLLOW — A preferred alternative to continue with cleanup and decommissioning at the West Valley Demonstration Project was announced Wednesday.

After meeting for more than a year, a core team of about 15 federal and state nuclear regulators agreed to recommend a plan that includes decontamination, demolition and removal of the main process building and cleaning up a contaminated groundwater plume. They also agreed to recommend drying out high level radioactive waste tanks, which would remain in the ground pending reviews every five years for up to 30 years. No commitment is being made to remove the tanks.

State officials also proposed continuing to maintain low-level radioactive waste buried in trenches in the state disposal area for up to 30 years before deciding whether to excavate the 16 million cubic feet of material or leave it buried



RICK MILLER/Olean Times Herald

Ray Vaughan (left), of the West Valley Citizens Task Force, asks a question during a meeting Wednesday. At right is John Chamberlain of West Valley Environmental Services, who served as moderator.

at the site in the town of Ashford. State officials estimate the cost to exhume, package and ship the low-level radioactive waste to an approved site at \$4 billion.

The adjacent federal disposal area would be covered with a rubber membrane to prevent water from infiltrating and it too would be monitored and maintained for at least 30 years before a decision is made whether the exhume the low-level waste.

Initial reaction to the preferred alternative announced by Bryan Bower, U.S. Department of Energy director of the cleanup at the former spent nuclear fuel reprocessing plant,

ranged from relief to wary. The presentation was made at a meeting of the West Valley Citizens Task Force at the Ashford Office Complex on Route 219.

"It is not really a plan to decommission this site," Judy Einach, director of the Coalition on West Valley Nuclear Wastes, said. "There are too many things left unanswered."

She said the plan appeared to violate the court-approved "stipulation of compromise" between DOE and the coalition, a grass roots group that has been a watch dog of the project for 30 years.

Eric Wohlers, Cattaraugus County direc-

tor of environmental health, and a member of the Citizens Task Force, congratulated the core group who worked on the plan.

"It's incredible this group was able in one year to come up with a path forward," he said. "We're happy the (process) building will come down and that the plume is being addressed."

Another Citizens Task Force member, Joe Patti of West Valley, said he agreed work must continue at the cleanup site, but he promised to hold federal officials' "feet to the fire" on the unresolved issues involving the tanks and burial areas.

Mr. Bower said the state and federal agencies will prepare a draft environmental impact statement detailing the decommissioning proposals sometime this summer, starting a six-month public comment period. The plan would be submitted to the Nuclear Regulatory Agency by the end of the year.

Most attending the meeting were glad that the cleanup would continue, particularly the process building that houses 275 high-level radioactive glass cylinders encased in steel and the radioactive plume, but concerned that the removal of the tanks wasn't recommended and a decision on what to do with the federal and state disposal areas wasn't addressed.

Federal officials initially proposed to demolish the process building and encase it in cement. That would have blocked access to the source of the radioactive plume that is heading toward off-site streams that empty into Cattaraugus Creek and Lake Erie.

Since there is no federal repository for the high-level radioactive waste, a new shielded facility will have to be built at the site to house the 275 canisters — each 10 feet tall and 2 feet in diameter — before the process building can be decommissioned and made ready for demolition, Mr. Bower explained.

The Department of Energy began preparing an environmental impact statement on the decommissioning and closing of the West Valley Demonstration Project in 1988, releasing it in 1996. It has languished ever since. The Citizens Task Force was formed in 1997 to help speed the review process, but members became frustrated over the lack of state and federal cooperation. Ray Vaughan of Hamburg, a member of both the Citizens Task Force and Coalition on West Valley Nuclear Wastes, presented a list of issues hen asked the core team to consider including seismic risk at the site, erosion modeling and long-term risk assessments of the site.

WEST VALLEY

Cleanup plan for radioactive contamination unveiled

By **Kathy Kellogg** CATTARAUGUS CORRESPONDENT

Updated: 01/24/08 7:09 AM

ASHFORD — A proposal unveiled Wednesday night would clean up key areas of radioactive and contamination at the former Western New York Nuclear Service Center but would periodically monitor conditions and delay other cleanup decisions for 30 years or more.

The proposal is one of several sitedecommissioning alternatives and is the product of a year of talks by a “core team” of representatives from regulatory agencies that have worked to clean up, study and monitor the site over the past 40 years.

The proposal will be inserted as a preferred alternative by the U.S. Department of Energy in its draft environmental impact statement, to be subject to a six-month public review period this fall. If the alternative is chosen, in a decision expected in 2009, some of the most worrisome elements of the reprocessing center will be removed.

The main plant process building and the below-ground source of a migrating groundwater plume of migrating strontium 90 will be removed. Solidified high-level waste, stored in the building in 275 canisters, will be taken to a newly constructed storage facility at the site. Low-level waste-water treatment facilities lagoons and other items also are targeted for removal.

What would remain for continued management are two state- and federal- managed burial grounds containing an array of radioactive materials and hazardous waste.

High-level waste and the contained portion of the groundwater plume, as well as other items, will remain in place and will be monitored.

These activities will help authorities continue their technical assessment and develop new cleanup technologies, said Bryan Bower, the Department of Energy director at the West Valley Demonstration Project who made the presentation.

Also unveiled was the “core team’s” preferred alternative for continued monitoring, evaluating and future management of the state-licensed burial grounds, covering a 30- year time frame.

Some members of the Citizen Task Force, a group of community representatives that has been meeting for 10 years to advise state and federal officials on the cleanup, expressed concerns about the length of time before future decommissioning decisions are made.

Judy Einach, director of the West Valley Coalition on Nuclear Waste, says she is troubled by the impact statement and pointed out the successful completion of vitrification — the encasement of nuclear waste — as a past commitment by the government to develop a cleanup technology.

“What is holding you back to commit to a cleanup?” she asked.

Department of Energy to outline alternative for West Valley cleanup

By **RICK MILLER**
OLEAN TIMES HERALD

WEST VALLEY — A U.S. Department of Energy official is expected to outline a preferred alternative Wednesday for the long-term cleanup at the West Valley Demonstration Project.

Brian Bower, Department of Energy director of the West Valley Demonstration Project will present a proposal by a "core team" that would require a new environmental impact statement. An EIS begun 12 years ago remains incomplete.

Mr. Bower will outline the recommendations of the core team — comprised of DOE officials and representatives of the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority at Wednesday's meeting of the West Valley Citizens Task Force starting at 6:30 p.m. at the Ashford Office Complex on Route 219 in Ashford Hollow.

New York state last year filed a lawsuit against the U.S. Department of Energy over the scope of the cleanup at West Valley, which was the site of the nation's only commercial nuclear fuel reprocessing plant from 1966 to 1972.

In the past year, the DOE removed more than 20,000 barrels of low-level waste mixed with cement. It also reduced the "footprint" at the site by demolishing uncontaminated buildings. Radioactive material is being readied for shipment off-site at the remote handling waste facility.

It's not known whether the preferred alternative Mr. Bower is expected to outline will involve removal of four high-level radioactive waste tanks, or if officials plan to continue drying out the tanks and "mothball" them

until a decision is made in future years.

The DOE has previously suggested the tanks — two of which can hold up to 600,000 gallons — could be filled with a grout-like cement. Members of the Citizens Task Force and Coalition on West Valley Nuclear Waste opposed that option, as did the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The core team recommendations are expected to include:

- Stopping water from entering the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's licensed disposal area.

- Drying liquids in the high-level waste tanks.

- Containing the North Plateau radioactive groundwater plume.

- Relocating high-level waste canisters in the main process building so the building can be removed.

- Removing the process building, a source of the North Plateau groundwater plume.

- Defer a decision on whether to remove the high-level waste tanks or leave them in place, and state and NRC-licensed disposal areas.

The Department of Energy oversees the 167-acre West Valley Demonstration Project site, part of the 3,300-acre Western New York Nuclear Service site.

With the solidification of high-level liquid wastes into 275 steel canisters in 2002, the Department of Energy turned to the decontamination and decommissioning of facilities at the site.

Employment, which peaked at nearly 1,300 in 2001, has dropped to just over 250 employees. Federal funding has dropped from more than \$100 million a year, to about \$54 million this year.