

## Obama budget boost funding to fight opioids, cancer

*Billions earmarked to battle opioids abuse, aid cancer fight*

By **Jerry Zremski** | News Washington Bureau Chief | [@JerryZremski](#)

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WASHINGTON – A big boost in federal funding to fight opioid addiction, along with a similar increase in cancer research funding, lead the list of proposals in President Obama’s fiscal 2017 budget proposal that conceivably could come to benefit Western New York.

Most of the \$4.1 trillion budget plan is likely to die in the Republican-led Congress, but local lawmakers said that the opioid proposal will at least lead to discussions between the two parties, while the cancer funding stands a better chance of making it into the law.

The spending plan, which the president unveiled on Tuesday, also includes smaller “sure bets” that would aid the region, such as \$36 million in funding for a new National Veterans Cemetery in Pembroke.

Obama’s proposal to budget \$1.1 billion to counter the opioid epidemic, which would go mostly to funding treatment, came on the same day local officials announced that 23 people in the Buffalo area have died of heroin and fentanyl overdoses since Jan. 29.

“This is very, very important,” Rep. Brian Higgins, D-Buffalo, said of Obama’s proposed increase in funding to fight the abuse of opioids. “This is a national crisis affecting every community in the nation.”

But Rep. Chris Collins, R-Clarence, said Republicans aren’t convinced that increased federal spending is the right way to fix the problem.

Republicans know that the opioid crisis is an urgent issue, though, and would be willing to discuss ways to address it, Collins added.

He said GOP lawmakers are much more strongly in support of Obama’s proposed \$1 billion “cancer moonshot,” which could lead to a dramatic boost in research funding at Roswell Park Cancer Institute.

Republicans are considering adding the cancer funding to the “21st Century Cures Act,” a bill modernizing the approval process for new drugs, which has already passed the House and which is being considered by the Senate, Collins said.

The Obama budget includes a series of noncontroversial line items that could benefit Western New York.

Leading the list is \$36 million for the construction of the veterans cemetery in Pembroke, money not yet set aside by Congress.

The spending plan also includes a provision creating a new refueling tanker mission at the Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station, a move Schumer announced last week.

In addition, the budget increases funding for the West Valley Demonstration Project by \$3 million, to \$62 million, while setting aside \$2.65 million for maintenance at the Buffalo Harbor, and \$1.79 million for the Black Rock Channel and Tonawanda Harbor.

Beyond that, the spending plan includes a series of reductions similar to those Obama has proposed in past years, only to see Congress reject them, such as:

- A \$50 million cut in the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, to \$250 million.
  - A \$40 million cut in the Low Income Home Energy Assistance program, to \$3 billion.
  - A 6.7 percent cut in the Community Development Block Grant program, which brought Buffalo \$12.6 million last year.
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## **Ashford board updated on Demonstration Project, solar farm**

March 13, 2016

By Max Borsuk

ASHFORD—The Ashford Town Board heard updates on the West Valley Demonstration Project and the proposed solar farm during their regular board meeting March 9.

Jeff Bradford, president and general manager of CH2M Hill BWXT West Valley, spoke to the board about recent and upcoming work happening at the West Valley Demonstration Project.

Bradford said that there are four main scopes of work on the project that are currently being worked on or set to be worked on in the future. The first is to relocate the high-level waste canisters onto a storage pad into vertical storage casks. Because of the recent weather, they were able to move an additional 3 casks out of the main plant. The original plan was to have all the waste moved by 2018, but Bradford said that they are ahead of schedule and they should be relocating the last cask by December 2016.

The second piece of the scope is to remove legacy waste that was put into storage, and ship as much as they can off-site for disposal. Bradford said that they have done a good job so far in removing some of the backlogged waste and hope to work with the contract to be able to move more waste out.

Moving out a melter and some tanks, Bradford said, is the third major piece of the work scope. They are planned to be shipped in September and will be taken to Texas for disposal. Bradford said that it will be trucked to Buffalo where they will be put onto a train and shipped out. Along with removing the melter and tanks, one of the biggest jobs is the demolition of the main plant. While it's not seen from the outside, Bradford said that there is a lot of work being done on the inside of the plant in the demolition process.

"There is a lot of activity, lot of work, a lot of dangerous work going on there everyday with our skilled workforce on the inside," said Bradford. "They are in there in protective equipment removing packaging, shipping that material out of there and getting it ready for final demolition."

Bradford said that if everything goes as planned, they hope to start early demolition of the vitrification facility by either late 2016 or 2017, with the main plant and other buildings shortly after. With this time frame, the project is expedited six to 12 months.

The final scope of the work will be taking care of some of the ancillary facilities. Bradford said that some of the structures will stay at the facility, including some waste storage facilities, the remote handled waste facility and the warehouses, so they can be used on the next phase of the project.

Supervisor Charlie Davis also talked about the proposed solar farm the town has been looking into building in Ashford. Davis asked the board for permission to send a formal letter to the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority to acquire their services to get more information about a location and additional research needed to move forward.

“I really encourage this to move forward and I want to move forward with it,” said Davis. “If we get the first one built, I plan on a second one and a third one and as many as I possibly can to take the town off the grid.”

Board member Richard Bernstein said that he found a company, CIR Electrical Construction in Hamburg, that would be another option the town can use for the solar farm project. The board agreed to have Bernstein contact the company to see if they will make a presentation to the board during the April 20 meeting.

Davis said that he would like the board to make a decision whether to move forward with the solar farm project by the next meeting in April.

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## SCHUMER, GILLIBRAND LAUNCH PUSH TO SECURE \$75 MILLION IN FED FUNDING FOR THE WEST VALLEY DEMONSTRATION PROJECT IN 2017 BUDGET – PROGRAM HAS BEEN SHORTCHANGED FOR YEARS & CONTINUES TO POSE ENVIRONMENTAL RISK TO WNY; SENATORS SAY FUNDING IS NEEDED FOR WASTE CLEANUP AT THE CATTARAUGUS COUNTY SITE

*The West Valley Demonstration Project Needs at Least \$75 Million Per Year to Completely Clean Up the Out-of-Use Former Nuclear Site; Feds Previously Agreed This Funding Was Needed for 10 Years Beginning in 2008, But Program Has Not Been Funded At Necessary Levels Since*

*In March 2015, Schumer Met With Nominee To Lead Department of Energy's Office of Environmental Management, Monica Regalbuto, And Urged Her to Support Full \$75 Million Funding Level for West Valley Cleanup in Future Years – Schumer & Gillibrand Today Push To Secure \$75 Million Needed In 2017 Budget*

*Schumer, Gillibrand: Fed Funds Are Desperately Needed To Clean West Valley Site*

U.S. Senators Charles E. Schumer and Kirsten Gillibrand today launched their push to secure \$75 million in federal funding for the West Valley Demonstration Project in Western New York. Schumer and Gillibrand explained that the West Valley Demonstration Project in Cattaraugus County needs an allocation of at least \$75 million per year for at least 10 years in order to complete the first phase of clean up at the former nuclear site, but it has been continually underfunded over the past several years. In 2008, the federal Department of Energy (DOE) issued an Environmental Impact Statement that said \$75 million per year in federal funding would be the most cost-efficient way to clean up the site. However, to date, the West Valley Demonstration Project has been significantly underfunded in the President's budget and by Congress. Therefore, Schumer and Gillibrand launched their push to secure the needed \$75 million in federal funding in the Fiscal Year 2017 appropriations bill.

“Each year that the West Valley Demonstration Project goes underfunded, the amount of time and money it will take to decontaminate and remove the radioactive waste from this Cattaraugus County site increases. This program has been continually shortchanged, year after year, and it is high time we finally get the \$75 million – minimum – this site desperately needs for the cleanup effort. The federal government cannot balk at its longstanding commitment to contain and restore the West Valley nuclear site,” said **Senator Schumer**. “That is why I am urging my colleagues in Congress to keep their promise to Western New York, where this site has become both a public health and an environmental hazard, and restore full federal funding levels to \$75 million in the 2017 appropriations bill.”

“We need to provide the necessary resources to decontaminate the nuclear site in West Valley so we aren't putting the health and well-being of residents in Western New York at risk,” said **Senator Gillibrand, a member of the Environment & Public Works Committee**. “I will continue to fight for increased funding for the West Valley Demonstration Project in the Fiscal Year 2017 appropriations bill. Without increased funding for West Valley, the

cleanup cannot be completed on schedule, which will result in higher costs to the federal government over time and prolong the environmental and public health risks associated with this contaminated site.”

Each year since the Environmental Impact Statement was issued, the West Valley Demonstration Project has been underfunded, despite the fact that it remains an environmental risk to all of Western New York. Additionally, despite the DOE’s suggestion of \$75 million per year, in FY 2015, the West Valley site only received \$60 million for cleanup efforts; in 2014, it received \$66 million; in 2013, it received \$61 million; in 2012, it received \$66 million; and in 2011, it received \$59 million. In FY 2016, the site received \$59.2 million in funding. This is why Schumer and Gillibrand are urging federal appropriators to fund the program in FY 2017 at the agreed upon \$75 million.

Schumer and Gillibrand have long fought to ensure the West Valley project is adequately funded. In March 2015, Schumer, during an in-person meeting, urged the President’s nominee for the Office of Environmental Management at the DOE, Monica Regalbuto, to prioritize the complete cleanup of the West Valley Demonstration Project and support full federal funding for the effort. During their meeting, Schumer argued that the short-changing of West Valley is out-of-step with other DOE cleanup sites, which have seen either sustained or increased funding.

West Valley spends approximately \$20 million each year on utilities, worker salaries, and other expenses so that decontamination work may continue. This money must be spent regardless, and therefore, the longer the project is underfunded, the more money the project will require in the long run. DOE’s inability to adequately fund the West Valley cleanup site has put the effort significantly behind schedule and continued delays as a result of low funding only increase the public health risk posed by the contaminated material that remains at the site. Schumer emphasized in his meeting with Regalbuto that DOE should prioritize full clean-up in the most timely and economically efficient way possible. Schumer also urged Regalbuto to take into account the potential impacts of environmental factors, such as erosion, which could have increasingly negative effects if the project takes longer than originally projected. It is only through full and swift clean-up that the damage to public health, the watershed, and the surrounding community can be mitigated.

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West Valley is the site of the first and, to date, only commercial reprocessing plant in the United States. After beginning operations in 1966 with a theoretical capacity to reprocess 300 metric tons of spent nuclear fuel per year, the facility processed a total of 640 tons of nuclear waste in six years before shutting down in 1972. The West Valley Demonstration Project Act, signed into law on October 1, 1980, required the Department of Energy to solidify and dispose of the high-level waste, and decommission the facilities used in the process.

The West Valley Reprocessing Plant was formerly an operational plant for the reprocessing of used nuclear fuel at West Valley, New York. It was operated from 1966-72. During this time period, 600,000 gallons of highly radioactive waste accumulated in an underground waste tank. Today, millions of gallons of radioactive waste remain at the site. The plant was shut down in 1972 after regulations at the time required plant modifications. These new regulations were deemed by plant operators to be economically infeasible.

A copy of Schumer and Gillibrand’s letter to federal appropriators appears below:

As you begin your work on the Fiscal Year 2017 Appropriations Bill, I write to express my strong support for the West Valley Demonstration Project (WVDP) in Ashford, New York. WVDP is a radioactive waste clean-up project within the Office of Environmental Management at the Department of Energy. WVDP receives funding from the Non-Defense Environmental Cleanup account within EM. As a result of difficult budget constraints, WVDP goes critically underfunded each year. Insufficient funding has had a variety of adverse impacts on the progress of the

project: the overall cost, environmental impact, and length of time needed to clean up and decommission the facilities at the site has increased. I urge you to prioritize funding for WVDP at \$75 million in Fiscal Year 2017 in order to enable the project to progress at a more expeditious pace.

From 1966 to 1972, Nuclear Fuel Services, Inc., under contract with the State of New York, operated a commercial nuclear fuel reprocessing plant at the Western New York Nuclear Services Center. The plant reprocessed uranium and plutonium from used nuclear fuel and generated 600,000 gallons of high-level radioactive liquid. After five decades of nuclear weapons development and production and government-sponsored nuclear energy research at the plant, massive quantities of transuranic and mixed low-level waste were left at the site, and the residue includes millions of gallons of contaminated soil and water from those research activities. In 1980, Congress passed the West Valley Demonstration Project Act, authorizing the Department of Energy (DOE) to use the site to develop a method for removing the 600,000 gallons of radioactive waste. In addition, it required the Department to decontaminate and decommission the facilities used in that effort.

In 2008, the Department of Energy issued an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) which established a phased process for removal of the waste. The EIS projected that Phase 1 of the cleanup could be completed within ten years with an annual budget of \$75 million. However, each year, funding for the project since the EIS was issued has fallen short of the \$75 million required. In addition, a total of \$20 million per year is required for utilities, worker salaries, and other expenses so that decontamination work may continue. This amount must be spent regardless, and therefore, the longer the project is underfunded, the more money the project will require in the long run. With this in mind, I am requesting a total of \$75 million within the Non-Defense Environmental Cleanup account in the Office of Environmental Management for the West Valley Demonstration Project.

A funding level of \$75 million will allow the Department of Energy to effectively and expeditiously clean up hazardous sites within the complex and will be the best way to address time sensitive environmental concerns. I recognize the difficult budget constraints under which you are working, and appreciate your consideration of this request. It is absolutely imperative that we prioritize the complete cleanup of the West Valley site. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can provide more information in support of this request.

Sincerely,

Charles E. Schumer

United States Senator

Kirsten Gillibrand

United States Senator