

The war's over; clean up battlefield

Two days after April Fool's Day, 1947, David E. Lilienthal, the first chairman of the newly formed civilian Atomic Energy Commission, met with then-President Truman to report on the status of this country's atomic bomb arsenal. It had long been understood that Churchill and Roosevelt were only able to deter Stalin from moving on into a defenseless Europe by convincing him of the allies' possession of the ultimate weapon and our resolve to use it. What followed had to be a classic in the annals of White House moments. Civilian Lilienthal broke the news to Commander-in-Chief Truman that America's much respected and feared atomic weapons' cupboard was bare! Not a single operable bomb could be found in the Los Alamos vault, according to Dixy Lee Ray in "Trashing the Planet." This information was considered so secret that it hadn't even been committed to top secret documents! (As Vice-President Truman was also kept in the dark during the Manhattan Project until two weeks before the bombs were dropped on Japan...now that's secret!) Sen. Tom Harkin reported this in "Five Minutes to Midnight."

In the years that followed, this country went on a nuclear weapon's production fury that can only be described as hell bent and maniacal. Unfortunately, quiet old Lewiston factored into this unholy equation.

In a June 2, 1955 memo, marked Secret, from AEC Director E.J. Bloch, it states the choice of the Niagara Falls Storage Site for nuclear waste storage hinged solely on availability rather than suitability that the site should be considered grossly contaminated and the permanent use of the NFSS area be undesirable from a long-range

GUEST VIEW



Timothy Henderson

commission standpoint because of residential growth, limited lifetime (50 years) and limited access for burial due to a high water table. Absolutely nothing has changed since that declaration almost 40 years ago except the volume of contaminated soils has grown twenty-fold under the current site management policy.

We have been told right along by the Department of Energy that there is no place at present to ship Lewiston's highly radioactive residues to. Apparently, they suffer from temporary amnesia. Since 1957, over 500 shipments of the Navy's high-level radioactive waste from Newport News, Va., has been sent secretly by special train to the INEL (Idaho National Engineering Laboratory) in Scoville, Idaho. No state agencies, emergency response teams or communities along the route were notified because of fear from terrorist attack. (The Navy and DOE are exempt from Nuclear Regulatory Commission regulation.) As taxpayers, we might be paying for it but that doesn't mean we're buying it.

One has to wonder if top secret and other high-security designations aren't designed more to prevent embarrassment than to protect secrets. President Eisenhower, in his farewell address, warned the country of the very real threat from within of a powerful military complex setting this country's agenda. A military that

views civilians with contempt or, worse, as targets. The real power in our country comes not from weapons of destruction but from those who have constructive ideas. Dissent and disagreement is an important part of America's fabric. This alone makes each and every one of us a shareholder.

Often the government is painted with a broad brush as being incompetent or indifferent. Our very own Congressman LaFalce is the exception. He has been working diligently on our behalf from the very beginning, involving a number of important colleagues and agencies in our struggle. The congressman and his staff have been readily accessible. His quietly demanding style is that of a workhorse rather than a showhorse. I believe that we have reached the place of not necessarily wondering what the solution is but rather finding a way to implement it.

Our democratic process is driven by a well-informed electorate struggling together with our representatives to effect permanent solutions to problems.

Our problems, nuclear waste, left alone, will haunt Lewiston for at least the next 1,600 years. Sunshine is always the best disinfectant. The Department of Energy can no longer hide behind the dark veil of national security or top secret. The Cold War is over folks, it is time to come home. Home to safe communities free from the threat of nuclear waste from the ultimate weapon which ultimately and ironically has made victims of the very people it was designed to protect.

Timothy Henderson of Lewiston is president of Residents Organized for Lewiston-Porter's Environment, Inc.