

DOE should consider private contract for waste removal

It was always one of my father's favorite expressions. Whenever someone began to make a simple project complicated, he would say, "Don't turn this into a federal project."

I didn't understand the full meaning of the expression until I began working with the United States Department of Energy (DOE) on the issue of removing nuclear waste from the Town of Tonawanda.

For the past seven years, the DOE has been trying to figure out what to do with 350,000 cubic yards of radioactive waste left here from the manufacture of the first nuclear weapon. Their first study concluded that the waste should be stored in a landfill on the banks of the Niagara River. When this idea was met with near unanimous and bipartisan rejection, the DOE began a second study process.

Town
Affairs

**Carl J.
Calabrese**

Tonawanda
Councilman



As this process grinds on, a new factor has entered the equation — the threat of Congressional budget cuts preventing any cleanup from occurring.

I have repeatedly asked the DOE if there are any techniques that could be borrowed from the private sector, to reduce the cost

of off-site storage.

Because I have never received an answer to that question, I contacted representatives of Envirocare, a federally-licensed storage facility in Utah. What I found out was interesting to say the least. Representatives of Envirocare told me that the cost for disposal paid by the USDOE (\$200 per cubic yard) is based on very small quantities and that, if the federal government was willing to commit large volumes of waste, Envirocare would be willing to offer large volume discounts.

When this information was made public, the DOE admitted that Envirocare had offered a 16.5 percent discount. Their offer was made in return for a commitment of just 40,000 cubic yards of material. A commitment for all 350,000 cubic yards, or the 4-5 million cubic yards at all federal

sites, would drive the size of the discount even higher.

It seems that the first reaction of the professional bureaucrat or politician to a proposed budget cut is to throw up their hands and threaten to stop services. If the federal government followed some common-sense business thinking, the waste in our town, and towns across the county, could be properly disposed of at far less cost than the DOE is now estimating.

Thus far, the federal government has spent \$21 million "studying" this issue with another \$5-6 million budgeted for study purposes. That is \$27 million that could have gone towards ridding our town of this waste. Instead, it has gone toward paying engineers, consultants and bureaucrats or, what my dad would call a "federal project."

Spindle items...

● **ENVIROCARE UPDATE** — At the Tonawanda Town Board work session Monday, Supervisor Carl Calabrese announced that Al Rafati, a representative of Envirocare, would be coming to Buffalo on April 27 to give a presentation on the company. This is an effort to have the United States Department of Energy consider a large-quantity waste removal contract with Envirocare to decrease cost of town nuclear waste removal. Details for the open meeting have not yet been determined.

● **A WORK SESSION DISTRACTION** — Al Rafati of Envirocare sent Supervisor Calabrese a 13 minute video presentation explaining the company's operations. While the supervisor prepared the television for the video, a familiar group of children could be heard singing, followed by a big purple blob image with big eyes.

Yes, it was Barney. The supervisor hesitated a moment, but Councilman Ray Sinclair assured everyone that it was a rerun.