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DOE will start over

LaFalce urges feds' renewal of process for storage of waste at Tonawanda site

by PATRICK KEYES

The U.S. Department of Energy has agreed to reopen its review of how to deal with the radioactive waste in the Town of Tonawanda.

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The decision was announced last Thursday, April 14, by Congressman John J. LaFalce, who said he has been working behind the scenes for several months to

get the DOE to reconsider the waterfront storage cell location.

"I questioned the thoroughness of this proposed long-term solution, stressing the broad community concern, which I always shared, about the validity of these plans and the need for an exhaustive examination of all options," LaFalce said in a prepared statement.

He referred to the decision to store nearly 350,000 cubic yards of radioactive waste from four sites in the town at a newly constructed cell just off River Road near the town's waterfront.

LaFalce said the change is the result of "months of intense research and internal discussions and in light of new technological advances," adding that the DOE will seek comment on all alternatives. That process begins today with a meeting set for 4-7 p.m. at the DOE's Public Information Center.

While LaFalce questioned the thoroughness of the DOE's initial recommendation, some were questioning the thoroughness of the congressman's involvement in the process. Despite that, most local leaders were happy with the results.

"I'm cautiously pleased with the announcement," Calabrese said. "I think we won a skirmish but this may just be a prelude to lots of battles in a long war."

"I'm not caught up on the timeliness of the decision," said Eric County Legislator Charles M. Swanick, one of the DOE's most vocal critics. "What's important is that they're taking a new direction."

It is unclear how the process will proceed from here, whether new data will have to be gathered or how long this announcement delays the decision on what to do with the material. It is presently

stored between four sites - Ashland I and II, Linde (Praxair) and the Seaway landfill. The proposed site was a new cell on the Ashland I property.

Members of the Coalition Against Nuclear Materials in Tonawanda have wanted the waste removed from day one. Calabrese said he will not be happy until that is accomplished.

"I won't be pleased until I see a directive from U.S. Secretary of Energy Hazel O'Leary

that says the waste is going to Clive, Utah, where it belongs," Calabrese said. "We're still far from that point, so I'll remain cautious."

Calabrese said he plans to attend today's meeting, along with other CANIT members, with many questions. Swanick said he'll be there to hear what's happening directly from the DOE.

"We have to maintain that keeping this waste on the water-

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Forum today at DOE office

The U.S. Department of Energy will hold a public meeting on the cleanup process for the four radioactive waste sites in the Town of Tonawanda from 4-7 p.m. today, April 20, at the DOE's Public Information Center, 810 Sheridan Drive, Tonawanda.

DOE officials are expected to discuss the recent decision to scrap the original recommendation of storing the waste in the town just off River Road and answer any questions.

For information call the DOE at 871-9660.

DOE

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front is absolutely unacceptable," the supervisor added.

LaFalce said federal officials have been involved in this project since the 1970s at his invitation and he has received assurances from Secretary O'Leary that no other wastes will be brought to Tonawanda regardless of the decision on the current situation.

In addressing the DOE stance, LaFalce said it fails to address several health issues, migration of waste residue into the Niagara River, community land use plans and the scope of the entire clean-up project, covering 44 sites nationwide.

In a meeting last week with Thomas P. Grumbly, Assistant Secretary of Energy for Environmental Restoration and Waste Management, LaFalce said an agreement was reached to consider implementing volume reduction technology and analyze the cost of removing that volume from Tonawanda.

In conclusion, he took a jab at those who criticized his alleged slow action in the matter. LaFalce said the decision provides "convincing evidence that quiet, persistent behind the scenes communication and reasoning can get the government's attention. I believe, as I always have, that such an approach is vastly more effective than fear inducing rhetoric that unduly alarms the public."

Calabrese said the intent of his and Swanick's recent statements was to get results and if that rankling of feathers is what it takes to get action, that is fine.

"After five years of listening to this and telling them that we want this waste out of here, one becomes frustrated when you can't get an agency to listen to you," Swanick said. "I vented that at the DOE and somewhat at (LaFalce), but now we're headed in the right direction."