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**OUR VIEW**

# Hanford remains an extreme risk

One of the consequences of living near an enormous watershed is that we must be on guard about major pollution threats nearly everywhere in the France-sized Columbia Basin. The most ominous of these problems remains the Hanford Nuclear Reservation.

Awareness of the enormous scale of toxins at the former Cold War weapons site has been growing since a shroud of secrecy started to lift with collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1980s. Facilities once used to manufacture radioactive bomb ingredients at astounding expense now are the subject of a corresponding expensive cleanup. Almost pulsating with potential for harm, some of Hanford's vast stretches of desert will effectively be off limits for thousands of years.

What is new is the partial collapse of a rail tunnel at Hanford's PUREX plant, a hulking factory devoted to production of plutonium. Intended as a makeshift dump for large equipment rendered deadly by plutonium contamination, the tunnel was partially constructed of wooden railroad ties. Strong radiation like that in the tunnel eventually causes wood to crumble. The structural integrity of PUREX tunnel 1 has been compromised, leading to a recent emergency alert at the nuclear reservation. There is at least one more tunnel we're aware of.

This comes on top of other longer-term problems with the cleanup, including failure of some underground storage tanks that contain radioactive sludge, a byproduct of the nuclear-fuel manufacturing process.

A bipartisan group of federal lawmakers from Oregon and Washington, including Democratic U.S. Sens. Ron Wyden and Maria Cantwell and Republican Reps. Greg Walden and Cathy McMorris Rodgers, are insisting that the Government Accountability Office conduct a review of this daunting mess. Their demand is broadly intended to make sure legacy toxin

sites including the tunnels are on the U.S. Department of Energy's to-do list, with appropriate plans in place to safeguard workers and the public.

"As work continues to complete cleanup along the Columbia River Corridor, a long list of cleanup activity remains outstanding on the Central Plateau, including remediation and demolition of more than 1,000 waste sites, 500 facilities, and contaminated soil and groundwater — much of which is highly contaminated with radioactive and toxic waste," the lawmakers noted in their May 24 letter to the GAO.

There's ample reason to keep an eagle eye on Hanford. Even now, the public is only starting to become aware of the kinds of abuses of trust that happened there — activities that placed the reservation's downstream neighbors at risk.

For example, the Nobel Prize-winning Physicians for Environmental Responsibility note, "By 1957 eight plutonium production reactors dumped a daily average of 50,000 curies of radioactive material into the Columbia. Perhaps the most dramatic of these events was the 'Green Run' in December 1949, when 8,000 curies of iodine-131 were intentionally released ... Although the plume covered an area of 200 by 40 miles, no warnings were given and no follow-up of area residents was conducted. By comparison, only 15 to 24 curies of iodine-131 were released at Three Mile Island," the famous 1979 reactor accident in Pennsylvania.

Given all this context, it probably is unwise to cut Hanford's \$2 billion annual cleanup budget by \$120 million, as President Trump is proposing. While there undoubtedly has been financial waste during the cleanup, the tunnel collapse shows us that enormous unfunded expenses lie ahead.

Keeping more deadly contamination out of the Columbia River must be a top national priority.

**The public is only starting to become aware of the kind of abuses of trust that happened at the facility.**

**OTHER VIEWS**

# Budget proposal a fantasy built on a house of cards

By Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

Where's the real Paul Ryan when we need him? You know, that wonky digging-in-the-weeds guy who knew every budget forward and backward and upside down and inside out?

We ask because Ryan today is supporting a dream world fantasy of a Trump budget that purports to balance the budget in 10 years on a house of cards. ("What I see is a president keeping his promises," Ryan told Fox News). Others aren't as blind in their loyalty. Sens. Lindsey Graham and John McCain weren't the only congressional leaders to call it "dead on arrival."

In fact, "dead on arrival" is the best news we've heard about the Trump budget, which may be the least conservative in decades. If this were to somehow survive the sharp knives in Congress, the country would be in real trouble with millions left without services they need, a weaker defense and a massively growing deficit.

First, the numbers are literally unbelievable.

Among the problems: Critics say the budget double counts its tax cuts and includes revenue from an estate tax that it would eliminate, reports Business Insider. It also projects a 3 percent growth in the economy that virtually no one believes can happen. And it includes basic errors that former U.S. Treasury

Secretary Lawrence Summers said in the *Washington Post* "would justify failing a student in an introductory economics course."

While giving the president points for setting a good fiscal goal, The Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget said in a release that the budget is "based on overly optimistic economic projections" and that the president is "relying on phony growth and unachievable cuts."

As to allocating spending, the budget increases defense spending but in the wrong way: The National Interest reports that the budget "begins to repair but does not rebuild the U.S. military," and "does not live up to congressional expectations to better align resources with strategy after years of a growing mismatch."

At the same time, social programs are being gutted, which should worry states. Medicaid would take a \$600 billion hit on top of the cuts proposed in the American Health Care Act, leaving states "looking at a more than \$1 trillion reduction in Medicaid spending" *Governing* magazine reports.

Ryan has in the past offered scathing criticism of Democratic budgets, and he was right to do so. But the Trump budget blows them all out of the water. Ryan needs to take off his political blinders and join those who are taking a realistic look at Trump's nonsensical budget and saying "dead in the water."



**OTHER VIEWS**

# While other controversies rage, work on border wall moves forward

New revelations come almost by the minute in the Trump-Russia affair. A reasonable observer might conclude that is all that is happening in the Trump administration. But even as those troubles fill news sites and cable TV, administration officials are quietly moving ahead on one of the president's top campaign promises: the construction of a wall on the U.S.-Mexico border.

Although it hasn't received much attention relative to the president's many problems, extensive planning for the wall is under way, officials are evaluating specific proposals, sites are being studied, and yes, there is money available to get going. The work is being done under President Trump's executive order of Jan. 25.

"The executive order calls on the authority in the Secure Fence Act for us to begin immediately," said a senior administration official who recently provided an extensive update on the state of the wall project. In March, U.S. Customs and Border Protection sent out a request for proposals for companies to bid on the construction of prototypes — not little models to sit on someone's desk, but full-scale sections of proposed wall designs that will be put in place on the border. So far, Border Protection has received more than 100 proposals.

"We are evaluating what started out as a solicitation to industry and request for proposals — 18 to 30 feet high, concrete, impenetrable, hard-to-scale, the correct aesthetics," the official said.

There are some important points to remember before going any further. First, there is no intention to build a wall to stretch the entire border, from San Diego, California, to Brownsville, Texas. In his campaign, the president made clear that the wall need not cover every mile of the border. Certainly, no expert who supports more barriers at the border believes it should, either.

And the wall does not always mean a wall. The Jan. 25 executive order defined "wall" as "a contiguous, physical wall or other similarly secure, contiguous and impassable physical barrier." Planners say that in practice, that will certainly mean extensive areas with an actual wall. But other areas might have the type of fencing outlined in the Secure Fence Act, or some other barrier yet to be designed.

And that leads to a third point: The border barrier will not look the same at all points along the border. The terrain of the border is different — some parts are so imposing they don't need a barrier at all — and officials plan to design walls and barriers that fit each area, rather than one long, unchanging structure.

Right now, officials are studying how many "buildable miles" will need a barrier. At the moment, planners believe that about 700 "buildable miles" of the border will require a wall or other barrier. That just happens to be about the same amount called for in the Secure Fence Act.

Does the government have that much land available? The answer is mostly yes. Remember, from the numbers cited above, that



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there are more than 650 miles along the border with something on them — vehicle fence, simple pedestrian fence, whatever. That means the government has already gone through the land acquisition and approval process required to erect a barrier.

There's no doubt that hundreds of miles of truly impenetrable barriers would have a huge effect on illegal border crossings. Talk to some experts who favor tougher border enforcement, and they will say that even as few as 100 well-chosen miles of barrier would make a difference.

Once planners decide where to build, there will then be the question of what to build. If the decision is to build a wall, then the question is: a wall of what? Planners have decided that concrete will definitely be involved, even though it hasn't played much of a role in earlier barriers. Why concrete? "It's an interpretation of the vision," the senior administration official explained. By "vision," he meant it is a way to make Trump's oft-repeated promise of a "big, beautiful wall" a reality. Trump didn't mean a fence.

**If the decision is to build a wall, then a wall of what?**

On the other hand, using concrete presents one obvious problem. Whatever barrier is built, Border Protection agents on the U.S. side need to be able to see through it. That's always been a requirement with earlier barriers. So now, officials are looking for creative ideas for a wall that will still allow them full sight of the Mexican side.

That touches on the most important consideration for planners. A wall isn't just a wall. It is a system — a "smart wall," as they call it. It involves building a barrier with the monitoring technology to allow U.S. officials to be aware of people approaching; to be able to track them at all times; to have roads to move people around; the facilities to deal with the people who are apprehended; and more.

At this point, it's impossible to say what building a smart wall will cost, because officials haven't yet decided on a plan. Republicans on the Hill argue that they got as much money in the recent spending bill as they could for the project, given that they had to work with Democrats to avoid a government shutdown and fund the government through Sept. 30. "We weren't going to get anything passed that said, quote-unquote, 'wall,'" noted one GOP staffer.

The next funding hurdle will come when Congress considers spending for 2018.

Most House and Senate Democrats appear determined to stop a border barrier. They say it will be expensive and ineffective, while some Republicans believe Democrats oppose the wall mainly because they fear it will work.

After the recent spending bill passed, some opponents of the wall declared the project dead. But any victory dance right now is premature. Yes, it's certainly possible the wall won't be built. But it's also possible it will be built, or that significant parts of it will be built. The work is already under way.

Byron York is chief political correspondent for *The Washington Examiner*.

