

**Another Voice**/Nuclear Waste

## West Valley's old problems are facing new Challenges

By Art "Happy" Klein

The problem can be summed up as mad science and bad engineering join looney economics to meet climate change and heighten the frightful specter of the West Valley Nuclear Demonstration Project.

West Valley demonstrates that treating symptoms rarely cures the disease.

It all began in 1966, when private industry theorized it could dissolve nuclear power plant radioactive fuel rods in acid to extract valuable plutonium, a very lethal base ingredient of nuclear energy.

This idiocy was halted in 1972 when unforeseen powerful conditions threatened to melt down the entire facility, and officials realized their technology and engineering were not adequate to the task.

Then, after three decades of expensive emergency effort, in 2002 much of the radioactive liquid in underground storage tanks had been converted to insanely radioactive gigantic glass modules that still stand outside on the plateau, like bowling pins encased in thick jackets that will not last near as long as their contents are dangerous.

Intensely radioactive sludge remains in the underground tanks and burial areas where unknown quantities of plutonium and other radioactive waste are loosely buried in the sand and glacial till to contaminate the area for thousands of years.

West Valley is now supervised by both the federal Department of Energy and New York State Energy and Research Development Authority, and survives on low budgets and slow progress.

To keep the public safe from dangerous materials, we have no more than shoddy containment to slow the spread of lethal radioactivity. Especially dangerous is the fact that all the protective work built will not last as long as the site will remain dangerously hazardous to humans. And now climate change is the new wild card.

This year the West Valley team assembled a group of climatologists. Their work can be seen at:

[http://westvalleyphaseonestudies.org/images/documents/ClimateWorkshop\\_Handbook\\_R4.pdf](http://westvalleyphaseonestudies.org/images/documents/ClimateWorkshop_Handbook_R4.pdf)

One common conclusion they shared is that the increased intensity of storms wrought by climate change can loose the hounds of hades and threaten the water supply of 14 million humans on the lower Great Lakes. A downpour similar to what flooded Gowanda in 2009 could wash the West Valley plateau into Cattaraugus Creek and then into Lake Erie.

West Valley signals that despite robust confidence, our technology still fails to manage radioactive waste. We constantly improve storage methods, but have to hope that the next generation can tame the radioactive monster we have created.

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*Art "Happy" Klein, of the Town of Tonawanda, is a member of the Sierra Club Niagara Group.*





## News

### **Cattaraugus County budget change reflected in Ashford**

Sunday November 25, 2012 | By: Jessie Owen, Journal editor

ASHFORD — The Ashford Town Board announced, during its Nov. 14 meeting, that it planned to send a letter to Cattaraugus County, expressing concern with and opposition to a new county law that would directly affect the town's budget.

Budget Officer Bill King told the board, in a letter, that Cattaraugus County had "moved to transfer the worker's compensation insurance payments to the towns, for direct payment to the county self-insurance plan."

According to Town Clerk Patricia Dashnaw, the county had historically covered the cost of this insurance. Ashford was then informed about how much its portion of the coverage had been. "When they were collecting taxes, they made sure they collected enough to cover it," she said, of Cattaraugus County's prior practice.

During the county's attempt to stay below the state-imposed 2 percent tax cap, it was decided that the county needed to focus its funding in other places, so the responsibility for this insurance was passed on to the municipalities.

Ashford was recently sent a bill greater than \$63,000 for its share of the insurance, due Jan. 31. "For a town the size of Ashford, that's a huge chunk," Dashnaw said, and King told the board that its preliminary budget would need to be amended, to include this charge. "We did not have this covered in the preliminary budget," he added.

"I wouldn't have a problem with this, if [Cattaraugus County] would lower county taxes by an equal amount," Town Supervisor Chris Gerwitz said. Dashnaw agreed, adding, "Either way, the taxpayers are paying for this. But if the county isn't going to be paying this anymore, the board thinks our county taxes should go down by that amount. The taxpayers shouldn't see it at all."

Board Member Charlie Davis said that this county-wide change would affect a lot of smaller towns, many of which would find it difficult to stay below the 2 percent tax levy cap. "I think it's a bunch of baloney," he added.

The board approved sending a letter to each of its Cattaraugus County legislators, appealing to them to keep constituents' taxes from increasing to reflect this change. Dashnaw recommended that taxpayers do the same and contact their government officials, about the issue.

"We cannot operate efficiently if we are blind-sided by [their] mandates," Gerwitz said.

"This just isn't right. It's crazy, what's going on," he added. "We are working to make sure we're using our money wisely. We pinch pennies and then we get this type of stuff, [that] we have no control over."

Legislator Donna Vickman may be reached at 676-3209 or [donnvi@aol.com](mailto:donnvi@aol.com). Legislator William Weller is available at 676-3889 or [whweller@cattco.org](mailto:whweller@cattco.org). Legislator Gary Felton may be reached at 353-8292 or [gmfelton@cattco.org](mailto:gmfelton@cattco.org).

In other board matters:

– The town's dog control officer submitted an official resignation and Dashnaw was authorized to advertise for a replacement.

– According to board members, the federal budget amount designated for the West Valley Demonstration was "\$20 million too low. West Valley is the biggest of the small closure sites," Gerwitz said. "We need to get in front of Washington, on this."

The next Ashford Town Board meeting will be held Dec. 12 at 7:30 p.m.

*Buffalo News, November 27, 2012*

**OPINION: Another Voice: Solyndra failed because subsidy was too little, too late**  
By Larry Beahan

Solyndra, the failed solar panel manufacturer, is a name that fossil fuel and nuclear energy enthusiasts have kept in the headlines. The Obama administration lost \$500 million by guaranteeing Solyndra's loans as part of the \$700 billion, 2009 stimulus package.

Solyndra and Solyndra-like projects must stay in the spotlight because supporting clean, renewable energy is exactly the direction we must follow if we are to survive the triple threat of climate change, dependence on foreign fuel and the pollution of air, land and water.

In Silicon Valley, multimillion-dollar companies fail every day. Without federal guarantees, funding for solar and wind projects comes at rates equivalent to Mafia vigorish.

The United States began energy subsidy with a 10 percent tariff on British coal in 1789. The nuclear industry has been the recipient of hundreds of billions of federal dollars and still does not charge rates that pay its costs. Federal subsidies to fossil fuels are estimated to be currently \$52 billion a year.

"What Would Jefferson Do," a review of the history of federal subsidies produced by DBL Investors, a venture capital firm, concluded: "... the federal commitment to O&G was five times greater than the federal commitment to renewables during the first 15 years of each subsidies' life, and it was more than 10 times greater for nuclear."

Vastly more money has been spent on fossil fuels and nuclear power than on clean energy. And these charges do not include the cost of the damage they do to our climate and our health:

- The National Academy of Sciences estimates that health costs from fossil fuels total \$120 billion annually. This includes the care for Buffalo's West Siders with diesel fume-induced asthma.
- Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo is asking the federal government for \$30 billion toward New York City's recovery from Hurricane Sandy. Sandy fits the pattern of climate disruption that scientists blame on global warming.
- The U.S. Department of Energy estimates the cost of cleaning up the West Valley Nuclear Waste site at between \$10 billion and \$13 billion. If the site is not cleaned up before a hurricane the size of Sandy dissolves its glacial-gravel plateau into Cattaraugus Creek, cleanup is estimated at \$200 billion.

Solyndra failed because China beat us to the punch by subsidizing its solar panel industry with \$30 billion. Our \$500 million loan guarantee to Solyndra was too little, too late. Tell your senators and congressman to stop wasting money on coal, oil, gas and nuclear energy. Insist they support clean energy programs like "Clean-FIT" proposed by Sierra Club and the United Steel Workers at: <http://newyork.sierraclub.org/documents/Clean-fitreport.pdf#>

Have some of those underpriced Chinese panels installed on your house.

*Larry Beahan is conservation chairman of the Sierra Club Niagara Group.*



## **Cattaraugus County Legislature Approves 2013 Budget Legislature Also Asks For More Money for **West Valley Demonstration Project****

December 4, 2012  
The Post-Journal

LITTLE VALLEY - Cattaraugus County lawmakers unanimously approved a \$218.5 million budget for 2013 recently.

The budget, a \$5.1 million increase over the 2012 county budget, carries a \$51,033,738 tax levy. The increase from the 2012 tax levy of \$49.4 million falls under the state's 2 percent tax cap.

The only public comment during the meeting came from Marjorie Webster, a registered nurse at the Cattaraugus County Department of Nursing Homes, who asked the legislature to reconsider the Jan. 1 elimination of the MDS position.

A motion to remove funding for the county Department of Motor Vehicles was defeated. Another motion to reconsider elimination of the MDS position was also defeated.

After the vote on the motions, the budget was unanimously approved by legislators.

The legislature also approved an extension of its contract with Motorola to make the county compliant with the Federal Communications Commission's requirement that counties have narrow-band radio in place by Jan. 1.

Legislators also approved an \$18,800 contract with Allegany County Community Opportunities and Rural Development Corporation of Belmont for to administer the county's Comprehensive Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention project in an effort to reduce teen pregnancy rates in Cattaraugus County. The county Health Department will expand hours at its Salamanca clinic two or three additional hours a week. The contract allows the county to stop the program if state or federal funding is cut.

An agreement with the Chautauqua County Health Department for lead risk assessment work was also unanimously approved. The work will cost \$30 an hour and work-related mileage, at a total cost not exceeding \$3,000, to be paid as invoiced. The program is state-funded.

Legislators also approved a resolution asking the federal government to stabilize funding for the West Valley Demonstration Project.

The House of Representatives' Appropriations Committee Energy and Water Appropriations Bill for 2013 provides \$50 million toward the clean-up effort, a \$25 million cut from previous years. Legislators are asking the federal government to reconsider the cut, arguing the loss of money will only lengthen the project.

Cattaraugus County officials say the cuts will double the amount of time necessary to decommission the facility and add \$200 million to the project's total cost.

Legislators want the federal government to restore the project's funding to \$75 million and commit to keep that funding in place for 10 years to complete all of the first phase work.

The resolution has been forwarded to the U.S. Secretary of Energy, U.S. Sens. Charles Schumer and Kirsten Gillibrand, U.S. Rep. Tom Reed, Gov. Andrew Cuomo, state Sen. Catharine Young, state Assemblyman Joe Giglio and others.



## Tom Reed visits West Valley

*Rick Miller/Olean Times Herald*

*U.S. Rep. Tom Reed (second from right) met Friday with members of the West Valley Citizens Task Force at the Ashford Office Complex. The Citizens Task Force is seeking to counter proposed funding cuts that could jeopardize cleanup efforts at the former nuclear reprocessing site, known as the West Valley Demonstration Project.*

By Rick Miller

WEST VALLEY – After touring the West Valley Demonstration Project and speaking to members of the Citizens Task Force Friday, U.S. Rep. Tom Reed promised to work for additional clean-up funds in 2013, but said it would be difficult given the country's fiscal problems. There are indications that the West Valley Demonstration Project might only get \$50 million next year below the level that many consider necessary to complete the Phase 1 cleanup and undertake studies for Phase 2, which would include a decision on what to do with underground tanks that held highly radioactive liquid wastes, and two landfills laden with radioactive material.

After a brief tour of the town of Ashford facility and discussions with Department of Energy and New York State Energy Research & Development Authority officials, Rep. Reed said there are factors that bode well for a higher appropriation. They include the bipartisan relationship he and Rep. Brian Higgins, D-Buffalo have enjoyed on the West Valley issue in the past, as well as the fact the higher level of funding can be justified and "makes sense," the Corning Republican said. Project Director Bryan Bower and Deputy Director Craig Rieman conducted the tour of the facility and a made presentation afterward. Site operations had been funded at levels between \$65 million and \$100 million a year. The Phase 1 project costs are estimated at between \$50 million and \$75 million a year.

Rep. Reed, who is a member of the powerful House Ways and Means Committee, told the DOE officials "I don't foresee \$75 million with this fiscal crisis. I also learned that there is a baseline we can't go under of \$20 million to \$30 million."

**Olean Times Herald**  
**Friday, December 7, 2012**

Rep. Reed also met with project workers, who's numbers have dwindled as funding falls and the clean-up enters a new phase. They urged him to seek additional funding above what the Department of Energy is proposing for next year.

The Department of Energy has not finalized a funding request for the West Valley Demonstration Project for next year, but it is believed to be a deeper cut than what would be required by sequestration if the federal government allowed the economy to go over the fiscal cliff. Members of the Citizens Task Force, which has been serving as a watchdog for the cleanup at the former spent nuclear fuel reprocessing facility, met afterward with Rep. Reed at the Ashford Office Complex on Route 219 in Ashford Hollow. "We just want to make sure the project gets back on track," said Eric Wohlers, director of the Cattaraugus County Health Department's Environmental Health Unit, and a longtime member of the Citizens Task Force.

He said several members were willing to drive to Washington, D.C. to speak with Department of Energy officials. He also presented a copy of a resolution recently approved by the County Legislature asking federal officials to consider increased funding levels at the West Valley clean-up project. Mr. Wohlers said West Valley appeared to be taking a deeper cut than other Department of Energy nuclear clean-up sites. "It's not equitable," he added.

Task Force member Ray Vaughan said the DOE studies on Phase 2 stay on track. Those studies will help guide the decision on whether to remove the underground tanks that held the liquid radioactive wastes, and still contain radioactive residue and sludge, and the state and federal landfills, where thousands of tons of radioactive materials lie buried nearby.

Rep. Reed said we should "get as much accomplished as we can" on the administration's side of the budget before it gets to Congress. "I don't want to raise expectations," he told the Task Force members attending the meeting. "It's a very difficult lift in this environment."

Rep. Reed said Rep. Higgins, D-Buffalo had offered to continue working with him on West Valley issues. He said the congressmen will reach out to the rest of the New York congressional delegation and the Sens. Charles Schumer and Kirstin Gillibrand to explain why the extra funding is needed.

"It's important to get this cleaned up," Rep. Reed said, adding it is difficult to believe most of the cleanup stems from less than six years of operation by the company that was taking spent nuclear fuel rods from government and utility reactors and recovering plutonium and other nuclear elements with processes using acid and other chemical reactions. "We want to do our part to get things done."

Mr. Vaughan also noted the high-level waste remains inside the main process building, and must be moved before the building can be demolished. Mr. Rieman explained earlier to Rep. Reed that plans call for the building to be readied in 2013 for the removal of 275 10-foot by 2-foot stainless steel cylinders containing radioactive glass logs made from the high-level liquid radioactive wastes. The containers would be placed in five-pack casks for storage outside on a concrete pad — probably in 2014. Eventually, when there is a federal repository for the waste, it will be removed from the site. Stephen Kowalski. Another Task Force member and president of the West Valley Board of Education, spoke against slowing the project by not fighting for the necessary funding for the clean-up. "When the job is done, that open the area for growth," he said, noting proposal by NYSERDA for a wind, solar and natural gas project at the site.



## 2013 ushers in several projects for town of Ashford

Monday December 31, 2012 | By: Jessie Owen, Journal editor | News

ASHFORD — Cattaraugus County Director of Engineering Mark Burr updated the Ashford Town Board on several projects that are scheduled for next summer, during the board's meeting held on Dec. 12.

Ashford Bridge No. 24, located on Thomas Corners Road, will need to be replaced. During construction, the road will be impassable and drivers will have to find alternate routes.

Ashford Bridge No. 53 on Edies Road, which has one lane, is also listed as a 2013 project. It will result in road closures, during the duration of the construction.

Burr said that a multi-jurisdiction hazard mitigation plan is still a possibility for Depot Street and what is known as the Ashford Triangle. "These areas historically experience flood issues, therefore making it eligible for consideration of a future project," he said. "This would be a federally-funded project; therefore, a lengthy and involved process."

Should this project move forward, affected Ashford residents would be contacted, as the work is being engineered. Cattaraugus County officials have asked that the town inform them, regarding the plan of the water district updates, so they would not conflict, as work is being considered for Depot Street.

In other matters:

- Supervisor Chris Gerwitz said that the West Valley Demonstration Project's decommissioning was planned, based on an initial budget that he said he believes should not have become an issue. As funding has recently been cut for the WVDP decommissioning, its completion may take longer than had been originally projected.
- An inspection must be done on the Fox Valley Road bridge project and paperwork must be completed, before final payment can be made to the town. Gerwitz said that some erosion has taken place on the south side of the project area, but that the replacement's integrity should not be affected.
- The board recognized Ashford Highway employee Steve Schlagenhauf for his 30 years of employment with the town of Ashford.
- Board Member Beverly Hess said that a community member asked her to look into lowering the speed limit on Fox Valley Road, because a farm animal was recently hit by a car. She added that the situation has been investigated and "the sight distance appears sufficient." She also mentioned her concerns with the weight limit on Dutch Hill Road.

The board's organizational meeting will be held Jan. 2 and the regular board meeting will take place on Jan. 9. A book audit meeting will be held on Jan. 16. All meetings will begin at 7:30 p.m.