

NY senators earmark \$75M for West Valley cleanup project

- Mar 23, 2018 Updated 58 min ago
 - WASHINGTON — New York state’s two U.S. senators say that more than \$75 million was included in the federal budget bill for cleanup of the West Valley Demonstration Project.
 - Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer and Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand noted they secured an additional \$8.6 million above current fiscal year levels in the spending bill, which is set to pass Congress in the coming days, to pay for ongoing cleanup efforts at the former Cattaraugus County nuclear site.
 - “After years of underfunding, this \$75 million federal investment will finally fully fund this year's cleanup in West Valley,” Schumer said. “Each year that the West Valley Demonstration Project goes underfunded, the amount of time and money it will take to decontaminate and remove the radioactive waste increases.”

Gillibrand added, “These federal funds will help ensure that the site will be cleaned up as quickly and safely as possible, so that Western New Yorkers can live and work in the area without having to worry about this decades-old nuclear waste.”

Earlier this month, Bryan Bower, Department of Energy director of the West Valley site, told the Cattaraugus County Legislature that a full cleanup of the West Valley site could cost a total of \$6 billion. The state and federal governments have already spent in excess of \$2 billion on the cleanup.

The DOE and the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) are working on a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) to determine the phases that will finally close West Valley.

Alternatives being considering for the site are:

- Sitewide close-in-place, which would rely on engineered barriers to prevent erosion from impacting buried wastes including the tank farm and state and federally licensed low-level disposal sites.

- Sitewide removal alternative, which would remove all facilities, contaminated soil and groundwater to allow unrestricted release of the property.
- Hybrid alternatives that would provide for complete or partial removal of some facilities while leaving other facilities under close-in-place protocols.

Meanwhile, Schumer and Gillibrand say that Congress has shortchanged the cleanup effort. In fiscal year 2016, the site received \$59.2 million for cleanup efforts; in 2015, it received \$60 million; \$66 million in 2014; \$61 million in 2013; \$66 million in 2012; and \$59 million in 2011.

Schumer, during an in-person meeting in March 2015, urged the former president's nominee for the Office of Environmental Management at the DOE, Monica Regalbuto, to prioritize the complete cleanup of West Valley and support full federal funding for the effort.

During the meeting, Schumer argued that the short-changing of West Valley is "out-of-step with other DOE cleanup sites," which have seen either sustained or increased funding. Schumer also argued that the underfunding of the cleanup only increases the amount of time the project will take, wasting taxpayer dollars and risking the health of Western New Yorkers.

West Valley is the site of the first and, to date, only commercial reprocessing plant in the United States. After beginning operations in 1966 with a theoretical capacity to reprocess 300 metric tons of spent nuclear fuel per year, the facility processed a total of 640 tons of nuclear waste in six years before shutting down in 1972.

During this time period, 600,000 gallons of highly radioactive waste accumulated in an underground waste tank. Today, millions of gallons of radioactive waste remain at the site and radioactivity from the site has been found in both Lake Erie and Lake Ontario.

The West Valley Demonstration Project Act, signed into law on Oct. 1, 1980, required DOE to solidify and dispose of the high-level waste and decommission the facilities used in the process.