

Mitrano Wants To Clean Up West Valley



Tracy Mitrano

Tracy Mitrano, Democratic nominee for the New York 23rd Congressional District, shared details Tuesday of how she would tackle the issue of the Western New York Nuclear Service Center cleanup of low-level radioactive waste at West Valley in Cattaraugus County.

Mitrano asserted that the \$75 million per year that is provided by a recently passed reauthorization bill from the House Energy and Commerce Committee is “*too little, too late*” and that closer to \$6 to \$10 billion ultimately needs to be spent to ensure effective cleanup.

Rep. Tom Reed, R-Corning, sponsored the bill that will provide \$75 million per year for the next eight years. Mitrano said that the insufficient funding from the bill represents another reason she thinks Reed has “*abandoned people.*”

“He is simply not doing enough to clean up this site,” Mitrano said.

Mitrano is concerned about the potentially cancer-causing nature of the radiation and the pollution caused by radioactive and chemical waste.

Citing danger to nearby waterways, Mitrano is worried about contamination of Cattaraugus Creek and Lake Erie. She mentioned studies suggest pollution from the plant has reached as far as Lake Ontario, but pollution there could be traced to another source.

“The cleanup is gravely behind schedule and even the first phase is years from completion, in large part because appropriate funding has never been secured and an aggressive timeline with milestones has never been set,” Mitrano said.

The purpose of the Nuclear Service Center is to house and process low-level radioactive waste, remnants of years of spent nuclear fuel. The site was once the only private commercial facility for reprocessing and disposing radioactive waste. When Nuclear Fuel Services Inc. left the facility in 1975, a need for cleanup began as “*multiple buildings, lagoons, disposal areas, contaminated soil, 600,000 gallons of high-level radioactive waste and a still-migrating plume of radioactive groundwater*” remained according to New York State’s Department of Environmental Conservation.

In the decades that followed, some aspects of phase one cleanup have been successful, including the conversion of high-level radioactive liquid waste into the easier to manage glass-like substance. The administration building has been demolished, but many structures housing radioactive material remain on the 175-acre campus.

Mitrano is aware there is a long process ahead before all materials are rendered inert. Some have considered making the site a permanent storage facility for nuclear waste, but those from concerned members of the Seneca Nation and worried citizen groups and scientists have expressed that heavy rainfall in the area would continue to wash waste into critical sources of water like Lake Erie.

After criticizing the lack of forward thinking that led to the current state of the site, Mitrano expressed that she wanted to be the representative to make sure cleanup is funded enough for *“proper and complete remediation.”*

In response to Mitrano’s comments that \$75 million a year is insufficient funding for the cleanup, Reed said during his conference call with regional media outlets that Mitrano is not aware of the situation. The congressman, who is being challenged by Mitrano this fall for the 23rd Congressional District, said he has worked closely with officials in West Valley to secure the \$75 million a year for the cleanup. He added that he is proud of the work that is being done by all those involved to cleanup the low-level radioactive waste at the Western New York Nuclear Service Center in West Valley.

“It shows to me that clearly she is out of touch and doesn’t know to what she refers,” Reed said about Mitrano’s comments.

In other news, Mitrano said President Donald Trump is *“making a mountain out of a molehill”* in regards to the new deal with Mexico that could replace the North American Free Trade Agreement. She said new provisions are appropriate as NAFTA is periodically revised amongst the three involved nations. She regrets the nation’s treatment of Canada in regards to trade and wants them to be a part of the final deal.

“Trade is an essential part of our foreign relations portfolio,” Mitrano said.

She also criticized the White House for its reaction to the death of former senator and veteran John McCain. Mitrano thinks McCain represented the honor of the armed services and attributes the generic comments made by Trump and the initial full-staff position of the White House flag the Monday after McCain’s death as a symbolic representation of how shamefully veterans are treated in the United States.

“(McCain) should be remembered with the highest level of respect from the highest office in the United States,” Mitrano said.

The Post-Journal’s Dennis Phillips contributed to this report.