

INL's hometown asks Wasden for leniency

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Idaho Attorney General Lawrence Wasden is a man who does the right thing. While many politicians allow themselves to be guided by prevailing winds, Wasden follows facts. Examples throughout his long career are numerous. Here are three:

- When fellow Republicans in the Legislature wanted to nullify the Affordable Care Act, Wasden told them a truth they and many Idahoans didn't want to hear: Their effort was unconstitutional.
- When then-House Speaker Lawrence Denney attempted to fire his appointee to the citizen redistricting committee, Wasden issued a cease-and-desist order because the action was illegal.
- And when his fellow Land Board members, including close friend and former Secretary of State Ben Ysursa and Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter, violated the state constitution by not pursuing the maximum return on cottage sites at Priest and Payette lakes, Wasden took them to court.

That's why we believe Wasden will follow the facts and do what is right. We believe he will grant waivers to allow the Idaho National Laboratory to receive and test two shipments of commercial nuclear fuel.

Why? Because these projects pose no environmental risk, would not violate the 1995 Settlement Agreement with the feds, could bring \$200 million into the state and solidify INL's coveted status as the nation's lead nuclear research lab.

Wasden and Otter are equal partners in enforcing the settlement agreement, which dictates that all waste leave Idaho by 2035. Otter favors issuing the waivers.

So does Wasden, but not until treatment of the last 900,000 gallons of deadly liquid waste begins.

The clock is ticking. The Department of Energy has taken title to the fuel and has to send it somewhere. The preferred destination is Idaho and it should come here. The lab has the experience, expertise and equipment to do the work.

More important to this debate, granting waivers to allow in the roughly 200 pounds of fuel - not even a drop in a very large bucket, given all the Navy fuel that regularly enters Idaho - does not absolve DOE of its obligation to treat the liquid waste.

Refusal to grant the waivers doesn't get the Integrated Waste Treatment Unit operational one day sooner. It doesn't affect the settlement agreement at all.

Do we really think DOE and its cleanup contractor, who have put more than a decade and around \$715 million into IWTU, are going to be any less motivated to finish the job because of an unrelated research project?

And does anybody truly believe that eastern Idahoans working on that and other cleanup projects don't take personally their mission to make their own backyard as safe as possible, for their children, grandchildren and future generations?

The fact being ignored by far too many is that the cleanup has been a remarkable success, and for that we owe a debt of gratitude to the architects of the settlement agreement, former Govs. Cecil Andrus and Phil Batt.

Cleanup milestones are routinely met. Waste has steadily left the state. Around 8 million gallons of liquid waste has been treated. The effort is not, however, perfect.

The stalemate over the last 900,000 gallons has been frustrating. But to tie a vital research project that poses no risk to one missed deadline is both foolish and counter-productive.

We have faith that those 900,000 gallons will be treated; that when the Waste Isolation Pilot Project reopens, cleanup contractors will continue to ship waste out, and that the process will accelerate if Congress and the executive branch can agree upon a national repository.

And who knows, those folks doing research at the lab might just save the world, if we let them. If we allow them the tools they need to make nuclear energy cleaner and more efficient.

Idaho needs the Wasden who stared down the Legislature, Speaker Denney and his friends and colleagues on the Land Board.

Idaho needs this rarest of politicians to ignore the shouts of the uninformed, distracting decades-old grudges and clumsy efforts to push him into a corner.

Facts and common sense tell us research and cleanup must coexist. Wasden knows that. And so, once again, we ask him to do what is right:

Issue the waivers. Before it's too late.