

When Lawrence meets Jeff, what will he say?

Marty Trillaase/Lewiston Tribune

You don't have to be clairvoyant to know what Idaho Attorney General Lawrence Wasden is going to tell Commerce Department Director Jeff Sayer when the two get together soon.

Wasden wants a sit-down with Sayer after the commerce chief fingered him as the culprit behind possibly disrupting the Idaho National Laboratory's ability to work on spent nuclear fuel.

This may concern a nuclear research lab 500 miles away, but there's no taking your eyes off the political train wreck.

To begin with, Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter - and reportedly Wasden as well - earlier this year appeared to agree with U.S. Energy Secretary Ernest J. Moniz's request to green-light shipping 200 pounds of spent fuel to the INL. The U.S. Department of Energy wants to know how well fuel that stays in reactor cores longer holds up. The project is worth about \$20 million a year to the INL - and far more in terms of shoring up its reputation as the nation's lead nuclear research center.

But the 20-year-old cleanup agreement former Gov. Phil Batt signed with the DOE stops the feds from sending more nuclear waste into Idaho unless it meets cleanup milestones. It's missing two:

- A 2012 target to transform 900,000 gallons of high-level radioactive liquid wastes into a more manageable solid form. A machine that's supposed to do that work, the \$571 million Integrated Waste Treatment Unit, isn't ready.
- INL wastes destined for the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant at Carlsbad, N.M., can't go anywhere because WIPP has been closed to future shipments after an accident occurred at the storage site.

Earlier this year, Batt and his predecessor, former Gov. Cecil D. Andrus, opposed the waiver, arguing that it would eviscerate the state's leverage under the 1995 settlement agreement.

Wasden also refused to go along until he had proof the IWTU could process at least 10 percent of the liquid wastes.

That's where things stood until last week, when Sayer issued a letter, on behalf of Otter's Leadership in Nuclear Energy Commission 2.0, noting the DOE may pull the spent fuel research program from Idaho and send the work to another lab. The deadline lapses next month.

"We are concerned that (Wasden's) Feb. 27, 2015 requirement that IWTU be operational before a research waiver is granted will permanently eliminate the 2016 project from coming to Idaho and will jeopardize future research opportunities," Sayer wrote.

To which Wasden told the Associated Press: "I'm deeply disappointed that Mr. Sayer would write a letter on behalf of the LINE Commission in which he outlines his understanding of my views without ever talking to me about my position and efforts, ... I fully intend to have a conversation with Mr. Sayer."

Here's betting it's a one-sided conversation:

Wasden: Jeff, your brother Doug Sayer's Premier Technology of Blackfoot supplied IWTU with specialized, pre-fabricated equipment. How do you think this looks? You're pressuring me to look the other way when IWTU fails to perform.

Sayer: But ...

Wasden: Have you considered the DOE's track record on liquid wastes? Remember back in 2004, when the agency tried to reclassify those wastes in order to leave some of them here? When Judge B. Lynn Winmill refused, the DOE's Assistant Energy Secretary Jill Lea Sigal tried an end run in Congress - and dangled the threat of holding up \$95 million in INL cleanup funds. She even persuaded former Sen. Larry Craig and Sen. Mike Crapo, both R-Idaho, to go along with it. Ultimately, Gov. Dirk Kempthorne and the state's two House members at the time - Otter and Mike Simpson - got the feds to back down.

Sayer: OK, but ...

Wasden: You work for a governor who insists on standing up to the federal government. Where is he? And if you guys want my help, how is running me over in public supposed to work? What were you thinking?

Sayer: So you'll think about

it? - M.T.