

THE CARLSON CHRONICLE

“What a web we weave. . . .”

Kudos to Attorney General Lawrence Wasden. Watching him last week on Idaho Public Television’s program devoted entirely to the issue of nuclear waste and the Idaho National Laboratory’s research mission, it is clear he gets what is at stake in the debate over Idaho abrogating the Batt agreement which bans the importation of any additional commercial nuclear waste material---even if the pretext is “research.”

General Wasden gets that he is charged with upholding the law and the Batt agreement is part of that law. He gets it that there’s an added layer in that the agreement was overwhelmingly approved by the people of Idaho.

Candidly, his show of resolve is encouraging. He reads the agreement correctly: It puts the onus on the federal government to solve the issue of 900,000 gallons of dangerous high level liquid waste stored above the Snake River aquifer. Some form of calcification permitting removal has to have been achieved and removal underway BEFORE any discussions can take place on the importation of any other radioactive material, including material allegedly for “research.”

The attorney general also noted that even in the short time he has been involved, the Energy Department keeps shifting the date for resolution on this critical matter. It is a classic example of an agency continually moving the goal posts.

It is no exaggeration to say General Wasden is a modern incarnation of the legendary ancient Roman hero, Horatio, who stood at one end of a narrow bridge and single-handedly defeated an enemy invading force. Folks, it is no exaggeration to say today that General Wasden is realistically the only person standing in the way of Idaho becoming the nation’s de facto nuclear waste dump.

Wasden gets it that with no national repository for highly radioactive material on the horizon, any material brought into Idaho even for so-called “research,” will NEVER leave.

In general the TV program, hosted by Melissa Davlin and Aaron Kunz, was balanced with some notable exceptions: the hosts never challenged former Idaho Senator Larry Craig's claim to have been responsible for the Batt agreement in the first place, an agreement he now wants to discard. Pure baloney, as was Craig's poor analogy equating nuclear waste to library books.

Nor did they challenge the obfuscation Energy Assistant Secretary-designate John Kotek brought to the program by his conveniently ignoring the series of broken promises by his agency. They should have asked him why any Idahoan, given that track record, should ever believe the agency or trust it?

Finally, what the program brought out was the strategy now being pursued by all the state's top Republicans, except Wasden, in their craven desire to get the 30 pieces of metaphorical silver. So there is a problem with the Batt agreement?

Well, the solution is simple, my friend. Behind closed doors we'll just renegotiate and "update" the Batt agreement. After all, it's over 20 years old. Follow this logic being espoused by Senators Crapo and Risch and we'd be redoing the Constitution every 20 years. So, why should Idaho even agree to these "negotiations?"

The Energy department is already out of compliance because of repeated failures to meet key deadlines. Rather than updating the Batt agreement, Idaho should vigorously enforce it because there is a fundamental question DoE is refusing to answer.

If Idaho were to agree to allow this supposed minor amount of commercial spent fuel into the state for "research," where will the material (not to mention the some 20 metric tons of spent fuel rods lined up behind) eventually go? The answer is, given the absence of Yucca Mountain (Nevada), nowhere. It will stay here indefinitely.

So will the toxic liquid waste even after it is solidified, **BECAUSE THERE IS NO OTHER PLACE TO SEND IT.** DOE, however, does not want to admit this which is why they redacted the answers to specific questions posed by former Governor Cecil D. Andrus, who has sued the department for failure not only to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act but also the Freedom of Information Act.

If there is one minor complaint regarding General Wasden, given his well-known commitment to transparency in governmental decisions and compliance with Idaho's open meeting law, it is he has not joined Andrus' suit to force DOE into FOIA compliance.

In the meantime all of Idaho's top Republicans will stand arm in arm with the Idaho Falls Chamber in trying to peddle this pig in a poke about just a small amount of waste for research purposes being allowed into Idaho.

What they really will do is to open Idaho to an entirely new generation of wastes to join the significant waste already here, while hoping the public won't focus on failures to meet long-ago agreed to clean-up deadlines.

These boosters, these Judas' who risk a future they'll not have to live with, are right now being thwarted by one man of integrity and courage, Attorney General Lawrence Wasden. Pray that he remains strong and resolute.