

# AuCoin

## SENATE

STATEMENT BY REPRESENTATIVE LES AuCOIN

League of Conservation Voters Press Conference

August 11, 1992

### THE TRAGEDY OF HANFORD, AND WHAT WE CAN DO ABOUT IT

The world's insane drive for nuclear weapons has, even at peace, borne some fruit more bitter than that of any war. Hanford is the prime American example.

Just think about one of the worst battles in history. The Battle of the Somme in the First World War. More men died there in a single day than we lost in all of Vietnam. Today, you can build a house on the site of that battle, and live there in peace. But at parts of the Hanford Nuclear Reservation, you can't do that. People may never again be able to live there. This site, where not a shot was fired, is more severely damaged than any battlefield in history. And the damage, like cancer, is slowly leaking toward the Columbia River. What an appalling indictment of the Cold War!

But that's past. Where do we go now? We need to do more than just point with alarm and wring our hands.

Here's what I've done:

In 1986, in the wake of the Chernobyl disaster, I called for the N Reactor to be shut down. I also persuaded the House to add \$2.5 million for monitoring the impact on Oregon of Hanford dumping.

In 1988, I blocked DoE from considering Hanford for use as a nuclear waste dump.

In 1989, I persuaded the House to add \$35 million above the Administration's request for Hanford cleanup. This included \$5 million for vitrification, which is the most promising long-term solution.

But all of this is a drop in the bucket compared to what we'll need for the long haul. So here's what I'm doing now:

I've actively supported several efforts to study Hanford's past health effects, both on former servicepeople who worked on nuclear programs, and on plain ordinary citizens who had the misfortune to live downwind.

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Let's be clear on one thing: There is no more Cold War. There is no more reason to compulsively shroud in secrecy everything nuclear. The only reason for the Federal government's reluctance to release information on past health-threatening practices at Hanford is to avoid exposing the guilty. That reason is unacceptable. We need to bring this entire sordid history out into the sunshine.

Turning now to cleanup, I've just recently become intrigued by a new technology for freezing the ground under leaking waste tanks. If it works, this could prevent significant leaks, and possibly also reduce the risk of tank explosion

I've drawn up two pieces of legislation to give cleanup more of the funding it needs:

One would prohibit the manufacture of tritium for weapons, and direct the money saved to DoE cleanup. This will give us about \$30 billion more over the next 20 years.

The second would end the disgraceful DoE practice of stealing cleanup funds to use for maintenance functions. If they want to maintain the N Reactor, let them do it out of the weapons budget.

I tried to offer both of these as amendments to the Defense bill this year. But I was blocked by the arcane rules of the House, that let me be blocked by Southern Congressmen who wanted to protect jobs at their won weapons plants.

I promise you this: Next year in the Senate, there won't be any rules to block me. We can all go at this hammer and tongs and, in time, we will succeed.

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