

Mayor's Progress Report 1-23-17

Community Support Played Major Role in WIPP Re-Opening

WIPP is back open for business, and that's excellent news.

Emplacement of waste into the underground facility began a few weeks ago, and shipments to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant will hopefully begin soon.

While it seems inevitable, from our point of view now, that the facility would recover from 2014's fire and radiological leak and get back open for business, the reality is that those events could have meant the end to WIPP.

Anti-nuclear activists, who do everything in their power to prevent any nuclear development, saw the 2014 events as a chance to shut WIPP for good. The sharks were circling. There were men and women in Congress who feared it might be time to pull the plug on WIPP – that the political ramifications of a radiological leak, no matter how small and isolated that leak actually was, were simply too great. There was, after all, terribly misleading and extremely incorrect information out there at the time indicating that large chunks of New Mexico needed to be evacuated.

Our Congressional delegation, as well as the Governor and other officials, did an excellent job of making the case to support WIPP. Of course, the true heroes in getting WIPP back open are the workers. The Carlsbad Field Office, Nuclear Waste Partnership, Sandia, Los Alamos, CTAC and many other subcontractors all played a role over the past three years in making this recovery happen.

The citizens of Carlsbad also played an extremely important role. That's not just an empty line – the community's response to the WIPP incidents directly contributed to the project's continuation.

This could have ended differently. If members of this host community had fallen victim to the falsifications and deliberate deceptions being circulated shortly after the incident by the project's detractors and vocalized massive opposition to the project, there could have been a much less happy ending .

Carlsbad residents, instead, took the wiser road. We continued to make it clear that we understood WIPP's role to the nation and wanted the project back open.

It is important to note that we, as a community, were not just cheerleaders for WIPP. We were tough supporters willing to voice high expectations. We wanted improvements to the maintenance at the facility and continue to want to see those improvements. We want safety, transparency and jobs affiliated with the project to stay local. However, our understanding that the project is an excellent service to the nation has never wavered. We especially appreciate the efforts of the Mayor's Nuclear Task Force and Chairman John Heaton for their leadership.

The Mayors' First Annual Shindig and Benefit Dance for Packs for Hunger is over and it was a huge success. Congratulations to Carol and Wayne Worley and everyone with ESA (Zeta Nu) for putting together such an excellent event. Most importantly, the shindig raised a great deal of money to go toward feeding local children. Master of Ceremonies Mike Currier did an excellent job, as always, and Proof and the Mariachi Unido Band provided top-notch entertainment. Thank you also to Linda Dodd,

Lavern Shan and Mayor Bob Forrest for saying a few words, and Councilman Jason Shirley for delivering the opening prayer. We look forward to the next shindig and any other opportunity to support Packs for Hunger.

It was also an honor to be a part of the ceremony celebrating Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. this year. Captain James Williams and his amazing wife, Julia, along with the MLK Scholarship Committee do such a good job with putting together this scholarship effort. Congratulations to Mario Salinas for being honored by this year's scholarship committee.

Southeastern New Mexico is in the news again. Many of you saw that ExxonMobil is buying access to about 3.4 billion barrels of oil-equivalent reserves in the New Mexico side of the Delaware Basin. The Albuquerque Journal notes that the area around Eddy and Lea County is one of the country's most prolific oil and gas zones, producing some of the highest returns in the country. Those of us who live in the area know that already, but it's always nice to see it made official. ExxonMobil is in good company – Concho Resources Inc. was one of our sponsors at the Backpacks for Hunger event. And last week, Devon Energy presented a major grant to the local Science Giants program. Thank you all for your support.

Last week, the United States of America celebrated a peaceful transition of power. We look forward to working with President Trump and his staff, especially in areas related to oil and gas, potash, WIPP, and supporting business opportunity. Our legislative session is also underway in Santa Fe. Please keep our representatives in your thoughts and prayers as they develop a budget for New Mexico. We all appreciate the Carlsbad Chamber of Commerce's Bat Brigade for making the annual trip to help represent the interests of Carlsbad.

If you have any questions or suggestions, please call (575)-887-3798.
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