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ATTORNEY GENERAL OF WASHINGTON

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June 16, 2004

The Honorable George W. Bush
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President,

I hope you enjoy your visit to our beautiful state. One of the most important issues facing our state today involves the cleanup of the federal government's Hanford Reservation.

A timely, thorough cleanup at Hanford is absolutely vital to the economic and environmental future of this region. In case you have not been briefed on this issue, I want to give you some background and alert you to some of the significant concerns we have about the cleanup plans by U.S. Department of Energy (Energy).

In 1943 the U.S. Government began efforts at Hanford to produce a nuclear bomb. As part of the Manhattan Project, Hanford created the plutonium that fueled the atomic bomb dropped to end World War II. After the war, work continued at Hanford to produce plutonium to help our country win the cold war. But these victories were not without a cost to Washington State.

Decades of defense work has left Hanford the most polluted place in the nation. We have 53 million gallons of highly radioactive waste stored in leaking underground storage tanks just seven miles from the Columbia River. In the past 50 years, more than 400 billion gallons of contaminated wastewater have been dumped at Hanford.

Results of a recent EPA study showed concentrations of chemicals in Columbia River salmon that could pose a health risk to those who eat them. Many of the ninety-two chemicals detected in fish samples, including DDT, PCBs and chlorinated dioxin – can be traced directly to Hanford.

Over the years, more than 140 million curies of radiation were released into the air, poured into the desert, or buried in the sand. And an estimated 67 tanks have leaked over one million gallons of high-level radioactive waste into the ground, where it has seeped into the water table that leads directly to the Columbia River.



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Alarming, we now know that underground plumes of contamination are creeping closer and closer, and in some cases have reached the Columbia River, which is the lifeblood of Eastern Washington and, for that matter, the entire Pacific Northwest.

The Hanford cleanup is an enormous, highly-technical, and incredibly expensive project. We in Washington want to be good partners in this exceedingly difficult undertaking, and we applaud the progress made by the Department of Energy to clean up the site. Serious differences, however, continue to plague this partnership and raise crucial concerns that Energy is placing expediency and cost above the comprehensive cleanup necessary to ensure the health and economic vitality of our region.

Let me mention just a few of the current issues.

First, we expect Energy to announce in the next few days that it plans to resume sending transuranic and low level radioactive wastes to Hanford from other complexes around the nation. This comes at a time when we continue to have serious concerns about Energy's accountability in cleaning up the transuranic waste already improperly stored at the Hanford Reservation.

Our second concern is Energy's decision to "accelerate" cleanup by simply redefining what constitutes high-level waste stored in tanks. The Federal District Court in Idaho rejected Energy's effort to unilaterally redefine "high level waste" stored at Hanford and other sites. Washington, along with other interested states, has filed an amicus brief urging the Ninth Circuit Court to uphold that District Court ruling. Perhaps sensing defeat in the courts, Energy has now turned to Congress for authority to simply "re-name away" this serious problem. Over the last three months, the state of Washington has had discussions with Energy in an attempt to resolve our differences and agree upon an approach that assures that tank waste retrieval, treatment, and disposal can move forward. Unfortunately, we have been unable to reach agreement. The bottom line is this: The accelerated cleanup plan cannot depend on a shortened yardstick of success. We cannot allow the federal government to declare success by simply lowering the bar.

We believe that the cleanup plan developed under the 1989 Tri-Party Agreement between Washington and the federal government is reasonable and will protect the region. We need good faith efforts to adhere to the plan to ensure the health and safety of the Pacific Northwest.

Finally, I would like once again to urge the federal government to have a national discussion on the issue of waste cleanup from Energy facilities around the country. These issues require comprehensive solutions and we need to work together, not against each other.

Unfortunately, real progress on Hanford cleanup in the past has come too often only under threats of lawsuits by Washington State. Litigation is divisive, time consuming, and expensive. We already have one pending appeal challenging Energy's reclassification plan. We don't need more. I hope you will direct Energy to bring a new spirit of cooperation to our Hanford discussions. We all share a vision of economic vitality, a healthy environment, and

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public safety. These goals are achievable at Hanford, but not without a better spirit of cooperation and understanding.

Washington has served its nation proudly, helping win World War II, and ultimately the cold war. We sacrificed much at the Hanford Reservation site in the process. Now we all must work together again and win the cleanup war.

Sincerely,



CHRISTINE O. GREGOIRE
Attorney General
State of Washington

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