



## Guest column: Alternative nuclear waste repository

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**Chris Carlson**

Idaho's candidates for governor should hold the DOE accountable on the Batt Agreement, writes Chris Carlson.

There is an opportunity for any one of the three Republican candidates for Idaho's governor — Lt. Gov. Brad Little, First District congressman Raul Labrador, or medical doctor and developer Tommy Ahlquist — to show some gutsy leadership skill as well as an understanding that a governor's role is to solve challenges.

For that matter, the same opportunity exists for either of the possible Democrat gubernatorial nominees, A.J. Balukoff or former State Senator Dan Schmidt.

The issue is that of holding the Department of Energy's feet to the fire by demanding they adhere to the agreement with former Governor Phil Batt and have removed from Idaho all the various nuclear wastes stored at the Idaho National Laboratory site west of Idaho Fall by 2035.

The Energy Department accepted this part of the Batt agreement because, at that time, they allegedly believed America would have its National Nuclear Repository at Yucca Mountain, Nevada, up and operating. They badly underestimated the power and skill exercised by the former Senate Majority Leader, Nevada's senior senator, Harry Reid.

Reid was able to cut off the funding and stop the project dead in its tracks.

The Batt agreement also forbade the importation of additional spent fuel rods, recognizing it made little sense to add to a supply of nuclear waste you were supposedly committed to removing down the road.

The implication for many was Idaho would become the de facto repository, keeping all high level wastes on-site while accepting additional spent fuel rods for "research." Support for this passive acceptance of the status quo quickly became a political litmus test for candidates for statewide office if they wanted support in eastern Idaho.

There is a real possible solution, however, that requires an ability to look over the horizon and recognize what is best for Idaho is removal of all the waste material.

The operating assumption for several years has been there is no alternative repository with the demise of Yucca Mountain.

But there will be a fully certified operating nuclear waste repository capable of accepting nuclear waste as early as 2024 known as Onkalo on an island off the coast of western Finland. It has been under construction for years, but is nearing completion.

Although Finnish law does not currently permit foreign nuclear waste, presumably Finland would negotiate agreements with the United States, the European Union, Japan and other countries which have nuclear energy facilities. To prod the process along, a governor and a state attorney general could conceivably open its own negotiations.

The point is that there is a viable solution. Any or all of the major candidates can and should get on a plane and go see for themselves what the Finns have accomplished that no one else has been able to do.

They'll see an entrance bored into near seamless bedrock, called gneiss, that is geologically stable and water resistant.

It drops 1500 feet down and then has a series of tunnels that run for miles with storage chambers where spent fuel rods are encased in cast-iron canisters further encased in two inch thick copper which is extremely resistant to corrosion. The chambers and access tunnels will then be backfilled with bentonite clay, which also absorbs moisture.

Here's hoping all the candidates for governor visit Finland and see for themselves the potential viable solution to an issue that has vexed Idaho for years, but now just may be on the threshold of a real solution for which future Idahoans will be most grateful.

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