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One View: Reid's call for cleanup assistance premature

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We were incredibly disappointed to read Senator Hany Reid's recent commentary and support for the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) proposal to place the Anaconda/Yerington mine site on the Superfund National Priority list (NPL).

As governor of Nevada, United States senator, members of Congress, mayor of the city of Yerington and Lyon County manager there is no responsibility we take more seriously than the protection of the health and safety of our citizens. That is our job. No economic or political consideration outweighs that solemn responsibility of any elected official or community leader.

The EPA said it wants to compete for NPL funding to address a future threat of fluid at the Yerington site exceeding the capacity of the current lined fluid containment system. This potential outcome would risk mine-impacted fluids being released to the environment. It is important to note that the discussion is about potential future releases, and there is no direct and immediate threat to the citizens of the community.

Senator Reid alleges that there are imminent threats to the community from this site. The senator is wrong. One of the most important steps the state undertook when the site was abandoned by Arimetco in 2000 was the water management. Had the state not taken action to enhance evaporation and reduce flows, the ponds would have overtopped and released fluids. Now, dust has been controlled, groundwater has been extensively studied and residents with impacted wells have been provided alternative water supplies. The Atlantic Richfield Company (Arco) has been and will continue to be held responsible for the investigation and cleanup of the vast majority of the 3,400-acre site. Only 260 acres - known as the Arimetco section - is what is in question today and is the impetus for EPA to propose a listing.

Currently, the state, the city of Yerington, Lyon County, Arco and other stakeholders are in negotiations and developing a funding plan to address the long-term issues at the Arimetco section of the site. Since receiving the EPA's letter we have heard from local stakeholders who believe that pursuing an NPL listing would devastate the local economy and who are fully committed to continuing the negotiations. Taking an additional 90 days to continue working with these leaders is prudent and fair. It jeopardizes nothing.

Placing a site on the NPL does not guarantee federal funds will actually be appropriated. Since the 1995 chemical tax went away, this program has never been fully funded. In fact, the most recent data shows in 2012 and 2013 the EPA only funded a very few new cleanup starts. This is not a good track record.

This is an important discussion and merits careful consideration and serious solutions. We remain fully committed to cleaning up this site. How we get there is the question.

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