

End funding for the Nuclear Facility at Los Alamos

The proposed Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement Nuclear Facility (CMRR-NF) is an unnecessary \$5 billion boon to Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico that will keep the weapons laboratory's doors open and its lights on well into the future. At the same time, as symbolic provocation, the facility will undermine global efforts toward disarmament and non-proliferation.

A Modern "Pit" Factory

CMRR was originally intended to replace the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research (CMR) building, an old structure that the laboratory has been trying to abandon for a long time, but still uses primarily for chemical analysis and characterizing materials.

The "replacement" part of the plan was deceptive, given that the scope of the new facility includes a storage vault for 6 metric tons (6,000 kilograms) of plutonium. Next door, but sharing the same security perimeter, is the existing Plutonium Facility, which contains all the necessary equipment and technology for assembling large quantities of plutonium warhead cores, known as "pits." If funded, this project would fulfill George W. Bush's plan to build a "modern" pit facility, capable of turning out large numbers of new warheads in short order.

Construction began on the first and smaller of two buildings in the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement (CMRR) facility at Los Alamos National Laboratory in January 2006. Current projections have estimated a completion date of 2022.

During the last several years of the Bush Administration, Congressional funding faltered for the project. House members in particular were aware that that the big build-up seemed to be at cross purposes with dwindling needs and international treaties.

House appropriators resisted and then denied administration funding requests, but the project was kept alive by Republican Sen. Pete Domenici's influence in conference committee negotiations.

Nuclear Rearmament

When the administration submitted its budget proposal this year, the funding request for CMRR-NF more than doubled to \$225 million from the \$97 million it obtained in 2009, with another increase to \$305 million expected for 2012.

The overall project has been marked by escalating costs, a tenfold increase since it began, and unsettling disclosures including the fact that the whole complex is sitting on an active earthquake zone that will require extraordinary measures. If it is built, CMRR will become the largest public project in New Mexico history by another factor of ten.

To add to the folly, the additional pit manufacturing capability is no longer needed, because the existing inventory will provide an ample and reliable supply until the last decades of the century. And there are less expensive and less risky alternatives.

Among the sane and sensible ways to cut the federal budget, this is one of the best, on behalf of our country and the world. If we do build CMRR-NF, don't ask where the money went for the schools we need, or the climate- and business-saving infrastructure, or the health and elder-care. We will have buried our hopes for a better future in a pit on a mesa in New Mexico.