

TAOS DAILY NEWS

INSIDE THE FLY

Whopping Expansion at Los Alamos National Labs

Read the Latest Edition:
June 15, 2005
on newstands everywhere.

June 14, 2005

By Jane Odin

*Welcome to
New Mexico*

*We invest in
nuclear;
P-Pits are our
specialty.
We invest in
WMD;
We make 'em,
ship 'em, store
'em.*



*Bombs are the
name of the
game.
Our politics are the same.
Tons of unburied nuke waste
Under tents in rusting drums.*

*Plutonium glows in the sun.
In the land of nuclear fun.*

*But there's very little security
At factories of nuclear purity.*

*Welcome to New Mexico.
Roll or bowl a P-pit
A penny a pitch.
Capitol of WMD, capital of WMD.*

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Introduction

LANL is permitted to burn 1,408 pounds yearly of depleted uranium (DU) in open pits. The amount is up from the May report of 528 pounds. But hopefully we have little danger of DU in Taos. The particles are so heavy they don't blow the distance. Dispersion models find that the particles travel 50 meters. That's the end of the good news. LANL is a bomb-making factory. The place is flowing with plutonium—from plutonium pits to unimaginable tons of high-level radioactive waste. And now the Department of Energy (DOE) is itching to expand into the world's largest unregulated radioactive waste dump and create the Rocky Flats of tomorrow: a Modern Pit Facility.

Meanwhile, will the Taos Town Council sign the resolution supporting U.S. compliance with the treaty on the nonproliferation of nuclear weapons and the closure of the LANL nuclear waste dump? Los Alamos Study Group says Town Council support is very important. The vote is scheduled for June 28, after a presentation by Erlinda Gonzales, Town Council member and member of LANL's Citizen's Advisory Board (CAB).

If the Council fails to support the resolution, it is a vote in favor of the war machine, high-level radioactive waste, proliferation of nuclear warheads, terrorist threats, radioactive pollution and a philosophy of no more tomorrows.

Area G

The DOE wants to expand the LANL nuclear waste dump (Area G) from 63 to 93 acres in fall '05. Greg Mello, Director of Los Alamos Study Group, says this must be stopped. Why focus on Area G? Fire, terrorism, environmental pollution, disease and proliferation are obvious concerns. Area G is said to have 2.5 million drums under three feet of sand. It's located on the regional aquifer that supplies water to Los Alamos, Santa Fe, Albuquerque and Pojoaque. Area G has never been licensed, regulated or permitted. Although the Attorney General says the site is operating illegally, neither Governor Bill Richardson, A.G. Patricia Madrid, nor the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) has acted to do anything about it. At least something should be done about the estimated 50,000 drums of plutonium waste under huge white nylon tents sitting on the mesa before expanding Area G.

A chemical engineer and past member of CAB says that in

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'99, unidentified radioactive gas-filled canisters piled up near Area G. "They would puncture tiny holes in the canisters and draw samples for analysis in an attempt to determine the exact nature of the waste," according to the engineer, who wrote in an extensive CAB memo that LANL needed to deal with waste-management situations "liable to have a major environmental impact on the surrounding communities." For example, according to NMED reports, there is noticeable Tritium and Strontium 90 contamination of groundwater in Mortandad Canyon. It is generally known that this was dumped through a sewer outlet into the canyon.

Details of health concerns and other issues are found at the Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety website www.nuclearactive.org. Look at "New Mexico's Right to Know: The Impact of LANL Operations on Public Health and the Environment." You will learn the Centers for Disease Control has found "the soil surrounding LANL may contain 100 times more plutonium than was previously estimated." That's just for starters.

Another major problem, according to Greg Mello and the Wall Street Journal, is poor security. Mello stated at a HUB meeting in Taos that on a scale of 1-10, LANL security is a 3. John Fialka writes in the Wall Street Journal that Army special-forces teams have tested security at LANL several times and demonstrated that "quick attacks by small, well-trained teams can penetrate department security forces and gain access to simulated nuclear materials used in the exercises."

Rocky Flats Moves to LANL

Currently, LANL is the only source of plutonium pits in the United States. These round, smooth grapefruit-sized pits are the trigger-explosive mechanism for W88 Poseidon submarine missiles. With Bush's push to expand Star Wars nuclear capacity ("Bush's New Nukes: Our Radioactive Future" in Earth Island Journal, Summer 2005) they need more than the 20 to 40 pits produced in LANL's facility.

Pit production was brought down from the Rocky Flats nuclear weapons plant when the FBI closed it for polluting the Denver-Boulder area, after faulty equipment created fires that released plutonium into the atmosphere. It had to be a critical scenario for the FBI to take action. The site was so contaminated the buildings and facilities were decontaminated and removed brick by brick. They are still working on closure.

Fashion

A Taos Jewel

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Guess what? According to an inside source, the DOE simply moved the Rocky Flats scientific personnel and pit-box equipment to LANL. Now LANL would like to win the government contract to build The Modern Pit Facility, capable of 450 pits per year, known as the new bomb factory.

The University of California stated in a letter to Hank Daneman in 1990 that plutonium production at LANL was a no-go. James Kane in the UC president's office stated, "the University has no intention of managing a plutonium production facility. Our contract calls for research only." Could this be an inside reason UC is out of the LANL management business?

Basically each pit is equal to a nuclear warhead. This is interesting, considering Article 6 of the Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), signed by the U.S., calling for nuclear disarmament. Town Council member Erlinda Gonzales is expected to urge the Council on the 28th to vote against a resolution supporting compliance with NPT and closure of the waste site. Why is this expected? In the past, when the CAB—appointed by DOE/LANL—has not supported LANL, it was removed from service. It is an interesting history, as reported to Horse Fly by a past chairman of the CAB.

CAB History

The purpose of the CAB, as set forth in the Federal Advisory Committee Act, is to identify environmental concerns of the local public, develop recommendations to prevent environmental degradation and to accelerate cleanup of legacy wastes. But this is not what occurs. A former long-term chairman of the CAB wrote in 1999 that the CAB was downgraded from "an independently aggressive board into a submissive one willing to sit placidly through the 'dog and pony' shows staged by the DOE at the beginning of every board meeting." DOE removed one entire CAB after it criticized LANL safety and waste management. LANL brought in new candidates and changed the bylaws for the purpose of "keeping the CAB within bounds." The head of waste management quit because LANL was diverting money that was supposed to be going to waste management to other places. "LANL treated budget allocations as discretionary spending," according to the former CAB chairman.

A DOE rep at LANL told me prospective CAB members are checked out by the site office manager and that DOE in

Washington makes the final decisions on CAB membership. So it seems it would be most difficult to criticize "the boss" and keep the job for two years. I hope the Town Council keeps this in mind when listening to Gonzales' presentation on the waste site. Taoseños should take a moment to let the Town Council and Mayor know how you feel about the resolution for nonproliferation and against nuke factories and radioactive waste storage in northern New Mexico.

Conclusion: What You Can Do

When Oppenheimer moved the Manhattan Project from Chicago to the boys' school ranch at Los Alamos in '42, the spot was chosen because of its total isolation. This is certainly not the case in 2005. Northern New Mexico is no longer the morally correct place to continue expansion of a whopping big radioactive waste site and P-pit facility. Also, plutonium pit production creates so much radioactive waste, it would make sense to move it closer to the WIPP (Waste Isolation Pilot Plant) in southeastern New Mexico.

On Aug. 6, the Los Alamos Study Group is sponsoring a Hiroshima commemoration celebration at Ashley Pond Park at Los Alamos, under the banner of "Stop the New Bomb Factory." Call 505-265-1200 to volunteer. Food and lodging will be provided. This will be an exciting event with music, drama, poetry and teach-ins.

Diane Gledhill needs volunteers to sign up more local businesses to the Resolution. So far approximately 65 have signed. Contact her at 751-3016.

There are a number of northern New Mexico groups working to stop expansion at LANL:

- Los Alamos Study Group, www.lasg.org, 505-265-1200.
- Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety, www.nuclearactive.org.
- Pax Christi New Mexico, www.paschristinewmexico.org, 758-1970.
- Nuclear Watch New Mexico, www.nukewatch.org (a wealth of timely documents on this website).



Date--06/14/2005 Section--News Edition--Journal North Page--1

3 Labs Rip Nuclear Program

[also in Journal Santa Fe]

John Fleck Journal Staff Writer

* The report, and one by a House subcommittee, calls for wide-ranging changes

The United States' current approach to maintaining its nuclear arsenal "looks increasingly unsustainable," according to an internal report by senior officials at the nation's three nuclear weapons labs.

The nuclear weapons program's future costs exceed the available budget, and the effort to maintain aging warheads is forcing the nation to retain a larger nuclear arsenal than would otherwise be needed, the report concludes.

Completed last month, the report's findings mirror in some respects those of a key House of Representatives subcommittee.

The House Energy and Water Appropriations Subcommittee issued a report last month calling for a sweeping reorganization of the U.S. nuclear weapons complex as part of its proposed 2006 Department of Energy budget.

The two reports set the stage for today's unveiling of the Senate's version of the DOE budget, written by Sen. Pete Domenici, R-N.M.

The outcome of the debate is critical to New Mexico, which is home to Sandia and Los Alamos national laboratories, two of the three U.S. nuclear weapons design laboratories. The federal government will spend an estimated \$2.9 billion this year for nuclear weapons work in New Mexico, more than in any other state.

The House and lab reports both argue that it is no longer feasible to maintain the existing Cold War nuclear arsenal by nursing along old weapons, refurbishing aging parts when necessary.

The labs' report, written by a quartet of senior nuclear weapons scientists and endorsed by the weapons program chiefs of the three U.S. nuclear weapons laboratories, argues that continuing to maintain weapons is possible "only at significantly increasing cost."

The program, dubbed "Stockpile Stewardship" when it was established a decade ago, "merely preserve(s) nuclear weapons with out-dated technology and a ponderous and expensive enterprise required to support old technology," the labs' report concludes.

Because of resulting uncertainties about long-term weapons reliability, "the United States must retain a relatively large number of reserve weapons to ensure against contingencies," the lab scientists from Sandia, Los Alamos and Lawrence Livermore national laboratories wrote -- spares in case problems crop up in some of the primary stockpile weapons.

Official stockpile numbers are classified, but the independent Natural Resources Defense Council, an

environmental and arms control group, estimates there are 5,300 nuclear weapons in the active U.S. stockpile and another 5,000 being held in reserve.

The House subcommittee, led by Rep. David Hobson, R-Ohio, raised similar arguments last month, concluding that the nuclear weapons labs need to design a new "Reliable Replacement Warhead" that is easier to care for in the long run.

Hobson's 2006 budget report calls for the new warhead to be "designed for ease of manufacturing, maintenance, dismantlement and certification without nuclear testing."

To do that, Hobson's spending plan would:

- * Reduce spending on refurbishment of current U.S. weapons;
- * Increase spending on design efforts for the new Reliable Replacement Warhead;
- * Reduce spending on preparations for possible future underground nuclear test blasts at the federal government's Nevada Test Site;
- * Cut spending on nuclear weapons supercomputers, arguing that they have not lived up to their promise as a way of conducting virtual nuclear tests to maintain existing weapons;
- * Eliminate funding for a new factory to build plutonium nuclear weapon cores; and
- * Delay money for a new plutonium lab at Los Alamos until the weapons designers have a clearer picture of what the newly designed warhead requires.

Greg Mello, an arms control activist at the Albuquerque-based Los Alamos Study Group, called Hobson's vision of a new nuclear weapons program "sweeping."

Aides to Domenici declined comment, saying they preferred to wait until they released their own proposed version of the 2006 nuclear weapons budget.

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TAOS DAILY NEWS

Sprinkling Plutonium on Your Banana

July 15, 2005

By Jane Odin

Background

Back in the '70s nuclear scientists chowed down on plutonium. The catchphrase of the day was "sprinkle some plutonium on your banana." Sounds like a chachacha. In the '40s and '50s scientists



forced plutonium on others. The Manhattan Project and Atomic Energy Commission injected unsuspecting hospital patients and prisoners with plutonium and learned how total body irradiation had radically different effects from individual to individual. (Read "The Plutonium Files" by Eileen Welsome.) Some died—some are alive today. Many of the experiments were conducted by Nazi scientists brought to the U.S. in Project Paperclip. The Nazi legacy of arrogant ruthlessness, deception, and cover-up is perpetuated today by the Department of Energy (DOE), as witnessed in their general philosophy and the management of nuclear proliferation sites across America, including Los Alamos National Lab (LANL).

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COLUMNS

Linda Fair

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Word Play

As you know from the June Horse Fly, the DOE wants to expand the Area G nuclear waste site. Meanwhile, we've learned the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) may issue a draft closure for the Area G nuclear waste site in February 2006. This development focuses magnified importance on supporting the nonproliferation resolution in front of the Taos Town Council.

What's Hidden in Area G?

The Town Council postponed the June 28 vote on the nonproliferation resolution, pending study at a council workshop on July 12. The council is scheduled to vote on July 19. (All of this, as usual, is subject to change.) Town Councilor Gene Sanchez knows where he stands. He will be voting in favor of the resolution and against the expansion of the Area G waste site. DOE Citizen's Advisory Board member and Town Councilor Erlinda Gonzales is expected to vote against the resolution. What else does one do when working for the DOE and LANL? At some point the council will view a DOE propaganda film on LANL.

What will the LANL film reveal? Will it point out the nuclear reactors buried under the sand at material disposal area TA 21? Nuclear reactors and spent fuel rods emit gamma rays, making it high-level radioactive waste. Will the film show Area C, where the super-hot waste is stored? And what about older sites—such as Areas A, B, T, and V—that date back to the Manhattan Project? No one knows what's in these sites.

LANL and the DOE say there is no high-level waste at Area G. According to the Los Alamos Study Group (LASG) this isn't the case. "LANL has routinely produced irradiated reactor fuel in its own reactors, of which there have been several since 1944, and this was buried at Area G and other Material Disposal Areas." What about the drill-back cores from underground tests containing the same radioactive isotopes in similar concentrations as spent nuclear fuel? Apparently there is high-level waste and every other type of ionizing radiation at LANL.

The DOE told Greg Mello, director of LASG, that Area G cannot close because some of the waste streams are so highly radioactive there is no possible way to ship them off-site. For example, no container will hold super-hot carbon accelerator beam stops. Should we be surprised that DOE continues to claim there's no high-level waste at LANL? Read about DOE's philosophy of deception and cover-up in the Caron

["A" is for "No"](#)

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The above selections are just part of what you'll find in this month's

Balkany and Wes McKinley book "The Ambushed Grand Jury."

Irresponsible Management

Have you seen the large black plumes blowing into Taos from Los Alamos? Now we know they are beryllium plumes. At a blogspot known as LANL: The Real Story, LANL scientists discuss the April 2005 hydrotest at the Dual-Axis Radiographic Hydrotest (DARHT) facility, which evaluates munitions and studies high-velocity impact phenomena. Their comments say Taos Valley is affected: "The prevailing winds take the plumes from DARHT and PHERMEX (not decommissioned) directly over TA-3, the town site, and have been tracked all the way to the Taos Valley. The test Friday had a large black plume that followed the same path. The foam does concentrate more Be at Darht [sic] but a substantial portion is still released to the environment."

When the plume first became an issue, Senator Pete Domenici was told the foam protection technique in use could only be 20 to 40 percent efficient in controlling the beryllium. "Pete's response was that it didn't matter if it worked as long as we were perceived to be doing something about the problem. He had no interest in the hazards as long as he looked good. And so in the end we got a much more hazardous work environment at DARHT and the public got a healthy dose of Be," according to the Real Story blogspot.

A healthy dose of Be is known to produce Chronic Beryllium Disease (CBD). According to a blogspot entry, "There are a number of people that work at or around DARHT that have contacted CBD and they will die from it. The disease has no cure. The symptoms are much like emphysema and it is debilitating before it is fatal. This is the information they don't want you to know." The authorities say some people are much more susceptible to CBD than others. Onset of the disease is signaled by shortness of breath, fatigue, night sweats, and coughing.

Other comments on the LANL blogspot go like this: "Why does nobody understand how badly LANL has deteriorated and how terribly irresponsible the management has been?" "Safety, security and environmental problems ... all these are solvable if someone cares. It's obvious that the bloated upper management at LANL doesn't care." "There are countless other examples of DOE's lip-service regarding safety and security."

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What's Happening?

James Bearzi, Bureau Chief at NMED's Hazardous Waste Department, says LANL will be compelled to close Area G by February '06. Bearzi says the issue is not so much what they have in Area G but that LANL continues to use this site as they have in the past. He says the post-closure permit and scheduling of public hearings will be the beginning of an enormous fight whose success depends on citizen response at the public hearings. The DOE does not want Area G closed. According to Bearzi, "This will be the first time the state has played its hand."

LASG Director Greg Mello says if the state moves to close the waste site it will definitely be the first time the state has played its hand. Mello has heard this promise on multiple occasions before. The waste site permit expired in '89 but has been administratively continued by NMED. Mello says, "LANL is not now under any threat from NMED to close Area G nor will it be next year due to any RCRA [Resource Conservation & Recovery Act] process." The last time Mello spoke to Bearzi, he was told that the "cleanup" order would be proposed by NMED and DOE for inclusion en bloc into the permit. So we have two contradictory stories coming out of NMED. Sounds like they're sprinkling plutonium on our bananas again and again.

We have a unique opportunity in New Mexico to stand strong for peace in a country that is escalating weapons buildup and continuing the militarization of space. We have a unique opportunity because we are at the heart of the beast. If you want to know details of what is planned by the Department of Defense and the DOE for our future, check out a most important document on the Internet: "Rebuilding America's Defenses: Strategies, Forces and Resources for a New Century."

Contact Taos Town Council members and urge them to support the resolution against proliferation. And try to attend Hiroshima Day in Los Alamos on Aug. 6. LASG's website (www.lasg.org) has all the details.

Nuke Lab Report Calls for Changes

from PAGE A1

— are among the state's largest employers.

The report praises the nuclear weapons labs as "national assets" but suggests it will not take as many people in the future to maintain the U.S. arsenal as are employed at the labs.

The report suggests that, in some cases, the laboratories have built redundant research equipment, such as supercomputers, when a single centralized machine would suffice.

Sen. Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M., said, if carried out, the effects of the report's recommendations "could be pretty substantial." But he questioned whether Congress and the administration would be willing to do what the report suggests.

Officials at the Department of Energy and the labs declined comment, saying the report was still being reviewed.

Even before its release, the report drew sharp criticism from Sen. Pete Domenici, R-N.M., the labs' chief congressional defender.

Domenici's congressional nemesis on the issue, Rep. David Hobson, R-Ohio, who originally called for the report, said Thursday he "agree(s) 100 percent" with the report's conclusions, setting the stage for a showdown.

The proposed lab cuts are part of a sweeping reorganization of U.S. nuclear weapons design, manufacture and maintenance recommended by the panel.

Whether the report's advice is accepted is up to the Department of Energy and Congress. The recommendations, contained in a "draft final report" published Thursday for public comment, go to the Secretary of Energy Advisory Board, an independent panel that provides advice to the Department of Energy.

Central to the plan is the design of a new "Reliable Replacement Warhead" that would be cheaper to maintain than existing Cold War designs.

That might mean more work for some weapons designers. But the report suggests that, overall, the labs' staff of nuclear scientists and engineers "can be significantly reduced." The report does not specify how many jobs would be cut.

In the short term, Los Alamos National Laboratory needs to increase its ability to manufacture plutonium nuclear weapons parts, the Advisory Board report concludes.

But in the long term, plutonium work now done at Los

Alamos and Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory should be moved to the new factory, the report recommends.

The report recommends that one extreme high-end supercomputer be maintained for nuclear weapons research. Currently, each of the three labs has its own — computers that compete for the title of "world's fastest."

Substantial money could be saved by moving work now done at Los Alamos' troubled Dual-Axis Radiographic Hydrotest Facility, where scientists detonate mock nuclear weapons to X-ray them, to Nevada to a central explosives testing site, the committee concluded.

The report makes only minor recommendations for specific cuts at Sandia beyond the general call for a reduction in the size of the labs' work force.

Despite their nonbinding nature, and the fact that it is only a draft document, the report's conclusions appear to have started a congressional debate about the direction and future of the U.S. nuclear weapons complex.

Domenici began criticizing it three months before it was made public.

In an April 18 telephone news conference, Domenici told New Mexico reporters the report's call for consolidation and cuts at the labs — at that point just a rumor — "probably won't be" accepted.

In a statement issued Thursday, Domenici said, "While there is always room for improvement I believe our labs are doing good work, and I do not think we should rush into any quick fixes."

Hobson, who has clashed with Domenici in recent years over nuclear weapons funding, was far more enthusiastic.

"The task force concludes that the current stockpile and supporting weapons complex is neither technically credible nor financially sustainable," Hobson said in a statement.

The disagreement between Hobson and Domenici is critical to the outcome of the debate. The two chair the House and Senate committees responsible for the Energy Department's budget.

The new report is largely supportive of the direction Hobson has tried to set for the budget, while Domenici's version is substantially different. The two must come to some sort of compromise by this fall on a final spending plan.

Report Calls For Big Changes At Nuclear Labs

DOE Advisory Panel Makes Suggestions

By JOHN FLECK
Journal Staff Writer

7/15/65

The United States needs new, easy-to-maintain nuclear warheads and significantly smaller staffs at its nuclear weapons labs, a senior Energy Department advisory panel has concluded.

The Nuclear Weapons Complex Infrastructure Task Force, in a draft report made public Thursday, calls for a centralized nuclear weapons factory to be built, consolidating work that's scattered among old Cold War-era plants and the labs.

Where the new plant might be built remains a question.

The report carries significant implications for New Mexico, where two of the nation's three nuclear weapons labs — Sandia and Los Alamos

See NUKE on PAGE A8

DOE funding hammered out

ROGER SNODGRASS
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Monitor Assistant Editor

4/8/05

House and Senate conference split the \$1.5 billion difference between their respective energy and water appropriations bills, they reported Monday. The House went up \$748 million to reach agreement on the \$30.5 billion measure; the Senate came down \$750 million.

"There were significant differences between the House and Senate on this bill, but I believe we have come up with a package that will maintain key lab missions without personnel or facility disruptions," said Sen. Pete Domenici, R-NM, chairman of the Senate Energy and Water Appropriations Subcommittee.

"I want to be clear that our increased investments in science, nonproliferation, nuclear energy and the like

will keep our labs strong. And when you consider the Homeland Security funding going to our labs, we are in good shape," he said.

The House-passed cuts and Senate-approved increases revealed fundamental differences in the two bodies' approaches to funding the Department of Energy, which was cut by \$179 million overall to reach the \$24.3 billion recommended.

The two houses of Congress must now endorse the agreement, before it is forwarded to the President for approval.

"I am very pleased with the energy and water conference bill," said Los Alamos National Laboratory Director Robert Kuckuck in a prepared statement. "Sen. Domenici has once again helped secure the laboratory's position as a world

See DOE, 6

DOE Mixed results on LANL projects

From Page 1

leader in national security, science and technology."

Key projects at Los Alamos National Laboratory met with mixed results.

One winner, as expected: Environmental Cleanup at the laboratory will increase significantly, from about \$80 million last year to \$142.2 million in FY2006.

Noting its importance to maintaining scientific integrity at the national laboratories, Domenici said the conferees had agreed to his effort to raise the Lab Directed Research and Development level from 6 percent up to 8 percent. This key item supports a variety of independent scientific projects, fosters recruitment and enables collaborations with many other institutions.

Another installment in developing the proposed Chemical and Metallurgy Research Replacement facility was fully funded at \$55 million.

"It is obvious that as federal budgets continue to constrict, that we will be faced with more difficult choices on the direction of the labs and some projects related to ensuring the safety, reliability and future of our stockpile," Domenici said. "In that light, we've built in a number of reforms and directives to force DOE to take a critical look at projects like Yucca Mountain, DARHT, pit production and other ongoing projects."

While the bill denies funding once again for construction of a modern pit facility, it instructs NNSA to improve the existing manufacturing capability at LANL, a move that nudges the laboratory closer to assuming a major long-term responsibility in that area.

LANL's Dual-Axis Radiographic Hydrodynamic Test Facility won its budget request of \$27 million, but the bill calls for an independent study by the JASONS research group to see if the unfinished second axis is on budget and capa-

ble of providing its expected function.

Gregg Mello, executive director of the Los Alamos Study Group, said he believes the hard decisions have been postponed for next year.

"Sen. Domenici has succeeded in getting money to Los Alamos, but a price has been paid in overall coherence," he said. "Horsetrading has resulted in a fragmented approach to the program."

In the broader weapons community, the bill restores full funding for Lawrence Livermore's National Ignition Facility, which Domenici had tried to cut. Domenici expressed his continuing doubts that the facility would meet future milestones.

The bill also continued the declining fortunes of Yucca Mountain, now dipping to \$500 million for the year, but including a \$50 million fund to reduce the spent fuel bound for the repository by setting up a recycling plan and campaign to find local governmental entities who want to volunteer to accept a reprocessing facility.

Despite the apparent resolution of budget uncertainties, LANL will continue to scrutinize its hiring activities through the current contract, which expires May 31.

"The council will closely review and consider each proposed hiring action to insure that priority is given to hiring positions that are crucial to mission and science capabilities, safety and compliance needs and internal efficiencies," said James Rickman, a laboratory spokesman. "The hiring council will help insure that the lab maintains a stable workforce and a sound fiscal profile from now through the transition to a new prime contract."

Also included in the bill, another \$5 million will go to Los Alamos County to stabilize the airport landfill and \$500,000 has been earmarked for Manhattan Project site preservation.

LANL

Bill gives money to science, research

By Andy Lenderman The New Mexican

November 8, 2005 p. C-4

U.S. Sen. Pete Domenici, R-N.M., has again helped to deliver billions in federal money to be spent on New Mexico nuclear, energy and water projects that employ thousands.

Science and research programs at Los Alamos National Laboratory and Sandia National Laboratories were clear winners in Monday's announcement of a deal between House and Senate leaders on the 2006 Energy and Water Appropriations Bill.

Weapons programs were cut overall. But a few specific weapons programs — such as the Reliable Replacement Warhead project and the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Facility at Los Alamos — were given as much or more money than President Bush's administration sought. The bill also directs the National Nuclear Security Administration to improve the manufacturing capability at Los Alamos for plutonium pits, which are triggers for nuclear warheads.

The \$30.5 billion measure includes an estimated \$4.4 billion for New Mexico projects overseen by the federal Department of Energy alone.

"I am very pleased with Sen. Domenici's bill," Robert Kuckuck, director of Los Alamos National Laboratory, said. "He has once again helped secure the laboratory's position as a world leader in national security, science and technology."

The lab has about 9,500 University of California employees and a \$2.2 billion budget, the majority of which comes from the Department of Energy.

Domenici negotiated with a leading critic of how the labs are managed — Rep. David Hobson, R-Ohio, who leads the House committee that oversees energy and water projects. Hobson has pushed for a new strategy for nuclearweapons funding. Plus, the federal budget faces pressure from costly hurricane cleanup and an ongoing war in Iraq.

"There were significant differences between the House and the Senate on this bill, but I believe we have come up with a package that will maintain key lab missions without personnel or facility disruptions," Domenici said in a news release. "I want to be clear that our increased investments in science, nonproliferation, nuclear energy and the like will keep our labs strong." Homeland-security funding also helps the lab budgets, he noted.

The leader of a nuclearwatchdog group was pleased with an overall decline in nuclear-weapons funding and elimination of the so-called bunker buster, or Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator.

But Jay Coghlan of Nuclear Watch of New Mexico said by e-mail that the country still spends "50 percent above the Cold War average on nuclearweapons research, development, testing and production."

Coghlan said his group and others will lobby Congress that the Reliable Replacement Warhead program, which Domenici says replaces parts on existing weapons, isn't necessary. He called it a "nukes forever program, and a Trojan horse for future new designs."

Coghlan also noted that the bill deletes funding for the Modern Pit Facility, a proposed new project to mass produce triggers for nuclear warheads, and directs the NNSA to improve manufacturing capability at Los Alamos. Greg Mello of the Los Alamos Study Group said the bill "tries to get as much money for New Mexico with as little thinking about the future as possible."

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URL: http://www.abqjournal.com/north/406206north_news11-09-05.htm

Wednesday, November 9, 2005

Lab Expected to Get New Plutonium Unit

By John Arnold and John Fleck

Journal Staff Writers

A project to replace one of Los Alamos National Laboratory's largest and oldest buildings— an aging nuclear research facility with a history of safety problems— would receive its largest chunk of funding to date under a new Department of Energy spending plan.

A \$30.5 billion Energy and Water Appropriations bill hammered out by House and Senate negotiators Monday includes \$55 million for construction of a new Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Facility.

The existing 550,000-square-foot building, located in the lab's Technical Area-3, dates back to the early 1950s and is used to test and analyze plutonium and other nuclear materials. But safety problems, including a 1996 explosion, have plagued the facility over the last decade, and lab officials say it's been expensive to upgrade and maintain.

Lab spokesman Kevin Roark said the new building will be more efficient, more secure and much smaller— about half the size of the current building.

"Really, the driver (for the new facility) was we don't need as much space. We need a facility that's cheaper to maintain, and we need a facility that's located inside an existing security perimeter," Roark said.

The new facility, to be located with other plutonium facilities in Technical Area-55, will cost an estimated \$838 million, according to Sen. Pete Domenici's office. In addition to this year's pending appropriation, Domenici, R-N.M., helped secure \$40 million for the project last year and \$10 million the previous year.

The project is moving forward over objections from lab watchdogs, who contend the new building is not needed and that it's part of a larger strategy to increase weapons manufacturing at the laboratory.

"We shouldn't build more plutonium space," said Los Alamos Study Group executive director Greg Mello. "The additional floor space is only needed because of the desire to design new weapons, to manufacture new weapons and probably also to do research and development of novel nuclear fuels (for civilian nuclear power). We're opposed to all three of those missions. If you take away those missions you take away the need for the facility."

In addition to CMR facility funding, the DOE spending measure also includes language likely to expand nuclear weapons plutonium manufacturing at Los Alamos.

The lab is currently working on a production line to manufacture small

numbers of plutonium "pits"— the radioactive cores of nuclear weapons. Current plans call for production of 10 such pits per year in 2008. The budget approved by negotiators Monday includes several directives that could expand that work substantially in the future.

The United States has not had a large-scale plutonium factory since the Rocky Flats Plant outside Denver shut down in 1989. Los Alamos has long been seen as an interim manufacturing site while DOE develops plans for a large new factory. But the 2006 budget approved by House and Senate negotiators this week cuts all money for that new factory, while directing the National Nuclear Security Administration "to undertake a review of the pit program to focus on improving the manufacturing capability at TA-55."

Domenici said that the CMR project is not directly tied to pit manufacturing.

"However, as long as the pit manufacturing mission remains at LANL, the more important the (CMR) facility is. It performs the analytical experiments on pits and other special nuclear material," he said in a written statement.

Work will begin on the CMR building's first phase— a radiological laboratory— early next year, Roark said.

The Energy and Water Appropriations Bill, which funds DOE, includes \$6.43 billion for nuclear weapons spending. That's a 1.6 percent increase for the coming fiscal year.

The House approved the measure Tuesday. It now requires Senate approval and the president's signature.

E-MAIL Journal Staff Writers John Arnold and John Fleck

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11/11/05

Weapons program draws split positions

Domenici: Goal is to improve existing arsenal; critics call project a backdoor upgrade

By Andy Lenderman

The New Mexican

Congressional committees have more than doubled funding for the Reliable Replacement Warhead program, money that will go to Los Alamos and Lawrence Livermore national laboratories. But proponents and a nuclear-watchdog group are already arguing about what the program means. Supporters say the program is just a concept for now, but one that could create more reliable parts for an aging nuclear-weapons stockpile. Critics say it's the backdoor to a totally new weapons program. U.S. Sen. Pete Domenici, R-N.M., a leading supporter, said in a written statement Thursday that "program designed build on the successes that we've had using a sciencebased approach to improving the design of existing weapons. This is not intended to be a new weapons program, but rather a method to improve the way that we manufacture existing weapons."

The goal will be to reduce the maintenance costs of nuclear weapons and improve safety and reliability, Domenici's office explained in a news release earlier this week.

A nuclear-disarmament group is opposed to the idea.

"The reliable replacement warhead is not needed," Greg Mello of the Los Alamos Study Group said. "... Designing a new warhead and building a new warhead ... is just a sharp stick in the eye to the rest of the world."

The program has been allocated \$25 million this year from Congress — up from \$10 million the year before.

The money, Domenici reported, will support a design competition between Los Alamos and Livermore labs "to create replacement components on existing weapons."

Both labs will submit their concepts to the U.S. Department of Energy in March, LANL spokesman Kevin Roark said. The labs will also submit "a very firm plan on how to get it done," he said, and the department will decide what to do with the concept.

"Nothing's been decided," Roark said.

Mello, whose group advocates nuclear disarmament, said the project will cause other countries to consider whether they should invest in new nuclearweapons programs.

And the project, he said, "will entail a multibillion-dollar program of construction and operation for these manufacturing facilities. It's a backdoor in an upgrade of the U.S. nuclear arsenals, and it's not something that the House of Representatives or the Senate can control ... once they let the dog out of the pen here."

A new budget bill pending congressional approval appears to restrict what can be done with the money.

"Any weapon design work done under the RRW program must stay within the military requirements of the existing deployed stockpile, and any new weapon design must stay within the design parameters validated by past nuclear tests," a report on the 2006 Energy and Water Appropriations Act reads.

Roark also said the program could lead to less nuclear weapons.

The directors of the program “are firm in their belief that the (reliable replacement warhead) really furthers the cause of stockpile reduction. Because if we have a robust reliable replacement for existing warheads then we don’t need as many warheads in reserve. And so the hope is this will eventually lead to a reduction in the overall stockpile.”

The programs and other weapons issues received more attention this week since Congressional committees negotiated a \$30.5 billion appropriations bill that covers the Department of Energy.

A second project to receive more money includes a new chemistry and metallurgy research building at Los Alamos, where nuclear-chemistry work would take place. The lab is scheduled to break ground on the \$800 million project early next year, Roark said. Not all the money has been secured.

Domenici secured \$55 million for the project this year and nearly \$40 million the year before.

Congressional committees have also directed the National Nuclear Security Administration, which oversees the nuclear labs, to strengthen the manufacturing capability at Los Alamos to produce plutonium pits, or triggers for nuclear bombs.

The last new pit, or trigger for a nuclear bomb, was produced about 15 years ago at the Department of Energy’s Rocky Flats weapons complex, Roark said.

“The U.S. lost its capability to make new weapons when Rocky Flats closed,” Roark said.

“We are slowly regaining that capability with limited pit production at Los Alamos.”

Some would argue this federal spending, and potential for more, is a good thing for New Mexico’s economy.

Although \$25 million could build a new school in New Mexico, it’s just a small chunk of the estimated \$4.4 billion that Domenici estimates the Department of Energy will spend in New Mexico during the 2006 fiscal year.

By comparison, New Mexico’s state government budget is about \$4.7 billion this year.

But Mello argues that reliance on federal spending actually depresses New Mexico’s economy because it discourages innovation and encourages complacency.

“The nuclear-weapons business has hurt New Mexico economically,” he said. “And the rise of the nuclear-weapons business has coincided with the relative decline of New Mexico in comparison to other states.”



Group faults lab on plutonium records

[print](#)

By Andy Lenderman The New Mexican |
December 1, 2005

A Maryland nuclear-watchdog group says Los Alamos National Laboratory should do a better job of keeping track of plutonium.

Various organizations involved in monitoring the weapons lab say they believe much of the highly radioactive atomic-bomb ingredient referred to in a new report is buried as waste at Los Alamos.

But authors of a report released Wednesday by the Institute for Energy and Environmental Research want managers of the federal lab to explain what it says are "major discrepancies" in accounts of plutonium at LANL.

One of the report's authors said there's no evidence the plutonium has left Los Alamos.

An official with the National Nuclear Security Administration's Los Alamos office was studying the report Wednesday. But spokesman Bernie Pleau said his office wouldn't be able to respond until today.

The report states: "An analysis of official data indicates that the unaccounted for plutonium amounts to at least 300 kilograms, and could be over 1,000 kilograms, though the higher figure appears unlikely."

Authors Brice Smith and Arjun Makhijani speculate about where the plutonium could be. However, Greg Mello, the head of a separate nuclearwatchdog group in New Mexico called Los Alamos Study Group, said activists have known since the 1970s that most of the plutonium in question is buried in waste at the lab.

Jay Coghlan of Nuclear Watch New Mexico agreed that's likely. "Nevertheless, we're talking about a very serious discrepancy," Coghlan said.

The report details discrepancies between documents at the federal Department of Energy headquarters and other DOE offices, Smith and Makhijani wrote.

A summary offers possibilities to explain the discrepancy, including that the plutonium is buried in waste or has been shipped to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant near Carlsbad. And if part of the plutonium is missing, they wrote, it would have major national security implications.

"If much or most of the plutonium was disposed of as buried low-level waste and buried transuranic waste, the long-term radiation doses would exceed any allowable limits," the report reads.

The report recommends a detailed explanation of the discrepancy and says appeals to the department and the lab "have failed to elicit a serious response or investigation."

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Thursday, December 1, 2005

Plutonium Unaccounted For

By John Arnold*Journal Staff Writer*

POJOAQUE— More than 660 pounds of plutonium at Los Alamos National Laboratory is unaccounted for, a Maryland-based environmental watchdog said Tuesday.

The Institute for Energy and Environmental Research compared public records data from the nation's weapons and disposal sites with a 1996 U.S. Department of Energy report detailing plutonium waste inventories. IEER researchers discovered large inventory discrepancies at Los Alamos, said institute president Arjun Makhijani, who co-authored a report on the findings.

"We've got three sets of books with plutonium numbers in waste, and they are so far apart that they cannot be reconciled by any reasonable means," Makhijani said at a news conference in Pojoaque.

Makhijani said his findings raise serious environmental, regulatory and security questions. The amount of unaccounted-for plutonium, a radioactive by-product of nuclear weapons manufacturing, can be used to make dozens of bombs, according to the report. There's no evidence the plutonium has been stolen or has left LANL, Makhijani said, but "it is the responsibility of the Department of Energy and (LANL manager) the University of California to guarantee that it has not gone off site."

It's possible that the unaccounted-for plutonium is buried in nuclear waste pits at LANL, which "would have very significant environmental and health implications," the report states. Another possibility for the discrepancy, according to Makhijani, is that DOE documentation understates the amount of plutonium being disposed of at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant near Carlsbad.

A National Nuclear Security Administration representative who attended Tuesday's news conference said the agency would analyze IEER's report and provide a response. John Ordaz, an NNSA assistant manager for environmental stewardship said the analysis would take time.

"But we're doing everything to make sure the public is safe, and everything we do is formal and by the book and we have many, many assessments," Ordaz said.

Makhijani's concerns aren't new. Anti-nuclear activists have raised the issue for years and in 2004 wrote a letter to then-LANL director Pete Nanos asking him to address inventory accounting discrepancies during a work stand-down at the lab.

Greg Mello, director of lab watchdog the Los Alamos Study Group, said he is "comfortable with the assumption" that the unaccounted-for plutonium is buried at LANL, is awaiting shipment to WIPP or has already gone there.

The root of the problem, he said, is poor disposal records, especially related to early disposal areas, that prevent an accurate accounting of plutonium waste.

"The uncertainty we have in (waste records) is more than enough to account for several hundred kilograms," Mello said.

E-MAIL Journal Staff Writer John Arnold

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Lab pact the pits?

All this money for Los Alamos' new partners.
All this drive for more plutonium cores. All this concern.

By Greg Mello

12/29/05

Since its inception in 1943 as Site Y of the Manhattan Engineering District, the facility now called Los Alamos National Laboratory has been owned by the U.S. government and operated by the University of California and its subcontractors.

This is now about to change. On Dec. 21, the management of Los Alamos was handed over to a new private company called Los Alamos National Security, which will assume full management powers at Los Alamos after a six-month transition period.

The company is a partnership among UC; Bechtel National (a subsidiary of the Bechtel Group); BWX Technologies, a nuclear weapons and nuclear materials manufacturer that does 96 percent of its business for the U.S. Department of Energy; and Washington Group International, a growing government services firm with large contracts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

As of last summer, Washington Group ranked fourth among all contractors in sales in those countries. Bechtel ranked sixth.

Most folks don't know that 96 percent of DOE nuclear weapons program spending goes to contractors, mostly for-profit companies. This month's decision continues the privatization trend, moving Los Alamos' \$2.2 billion budget into a new for-profit business that, unlike the

TODAY'S BYLINE

Mello is director of the Los Alamos Study Group, a nuclear weapons watchdog group in Albuquerque.

situation in the past, stands to make hundreds of millions of dollars in management fees.

If the new partnership succeeds in pleasing its federal paymasters, the organizations will be rewarded with a continuous, no-bid, government contract of up to 20 years, worth tens of billions of dollars overall and fees in the \$1.6 billion range.

There is also a great deal of the political influence associated with such enormous sums.

Can a huge, secret "national security" laboratory and production site be managed without waste, fraud and corruption in our present political climate? Not really. History concurs with common sense in this regard.

All three nuclear laboratories, as well as the nuclear production plants, have experienced egregious problems of virtually every kind, and in spades.

Los Alamos' scale is a big problem. Since the Reagan era, its budget has not been determined by the mission, but rather its mission has been determined by its budget.

U.S. Sen. Pete Domenici, an Albuquerque Republican, gets as much money for the lab as possible. And the lab gives him the language with which to get these vast sums.

Because the language is quite technical and Congress is quite busy, usually only a vague pseudo-scientific fig leaf is all that is necessary to hide what is essentially pork barrel interest.

Thus our senior senator is himself a major cause of problems at the lab. Our junior senator, Democrat Jeff Bingaman of Silver City, usually keeps a studious silence on the subject. Los Alamos represents, after all, his largest campaign contributor.

Los Alamos' three core missions are to maintain nuclear weapons, design new warheads and manufacture the plutonium cores ("pits") for both.

On Nov. 7, Congress tentatively assigned it the job of making pits for the nation's stockpile, a role UC did not relish and did not do well. Yet, this summer the secretary of energy's Advisory Board slammed Los Alamos for operating its aging plutonium facility at just "5 percent" efficiency.

But the new contractors now have hundreds of millions of dollars in fees riding on the proposition they can begin manufacturing Trident warhead pits in 2007 and a new kind of pit in 2012.

Is New Mexico ready for this? I hope not.