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The Santa Fe New Mexican (New Mexico)

June 17, 2010 Thursday

LAB 'ABOUT TO BECOME VERY BUSY'

BYLINE: KATE NASH

SECTION: MAIN; Pg. A-1

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LANL officials outline construction plans,

job possibilities

By Kate Nash

The New Mexican

ESPA[[#x201e](#)]OLA -- Los Alamos National Laboratory could get a dramatic and expensive face-lift in the next decade, including a new plutonium research facility, if Congress approves.

A 10- to 12-year construction plan unveiled Wednesday includes the last phase of the plutonium facility known as the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement facility, as well as plans to replace several other buildings, build waste-treatment facilities and close two material disposal areas. The work would mean about 1,000 new jobs.

LANL officials offered a first glimpse of the projects to area residents, local officials and potential contractors at a meeting in Espa \acute ola.

"It's about to become very busy," said John Bretzke, deputy associate director for project management and site services.

The projects are likely to cost in the billions, although lab officials hesitated Wednesday to put a price tag on the work.

"As much as I would like to answer that, I can't," Bretzke said in an interview.

The plans for the work along the Pajarito Road corridor are preliminary and the budget for them requires Congressional approval, but many who attended the two-hour meeting had questions.

Some queries centered on the work at the CMRR, where the second phase of three is ongoing. Officials say work at the current chemistry and metallurgy building includes analyzing samples of plutonium and other radioactive materials.

The new building is controversial in part because some activists fear it could be used to make more nuclear weapons parts, including plutonium pits, which trigger nuclear weapons.

Chimay \acute o resident Jason Ahmadi, 25, questioned the need for the project. "The question is why build this building É Why do we need this building?" he asked during the event at the Santa Claran Hotel.

Lab Deputy Director Isaac Richardson told him the existing building is from the 1950s and needs to be updated.

"If we were to not build this building, we would not be able to attract the talent to do all the other things we need to do at the

lab," he said.

Members of the **Los Alamos Study Group** have questioned the need for the building, and some members of Congress have questioned the price tag. The upcoming work also includes fences and security around the building.

Others in the audience asked about the environmental impact and what kind of workers could be hired. Lab officials said a new web page created for the project will contain a question-and-answer section for the public.

With so much demolition to be done as part of the construction, others wanted to know where all that waste will go.

Kim Shanahan, the executive officer of the Santa Fe Area Home Builders Association, asked whether the lab plans to recycle as much of the waste as possible, as local landfills fill up.

"We are trying to minimize the material that goes to the dump," Bretzke said.

As materials come down from the hilltop city, new material will be shipped in. Officials plan a new truck inspection station for deliveries. The materials are expected to include 2.61 million linear feet of wire, cable and fiber, 1.58 million pounds of ductwork and 122,000 cubic yards of structural concrete.

To manage the construction traffic, Pajarito Road, which is closed to the public, will be restricted to construction and emergency traffic, causing a headache for lab employees in the area. In addition, construction workers will need to be shuttled to work sites, as there is not enough surface area for parking, officials said.

As for the question of where so many new workers would live, shop, play or send their kids to school, that remains to be seen.

Bretzke said it depends on how many New Mexicans can be hired locally who would commute to the job.

"What we don't know is at what point we would tap that (local) resource completely and need to bring people in," he said.

Wherever the new workers live, state Rep. Jeannette Wallace, R-Los Alamos, said the city will be glad to have them. And, she said, the economic impact of the work will spread beyond her community.

"This is good not just for Los Alamos but for all of Northern New Mexico," she said. "We need the jobs, especially in the economy as down as it is right now."

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ON THE INTERNET

u For information on the projects, bidding opportunities and other community meetings related to the projects, visit: www.lanl.gov/construction

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Las Cruces Sun-News (New Mexico)

July 1, 2010 Thursday

NM group wants another look at Los Alamos building (3:30 p.m.)

SECTION: NEWS

LENGTH: 136 words

SANTA FE - An organization long critical of Los Alamos National Laboratory's plan for a new nuclear facility says the National Environmental Policy Act needs to be followed before the building can move ahead.

The Los Alamos Study Group contends the project is on a larger scale than alternatives analyzed seven years ago and has not been subjected to a NEPA analysis.

The watchdog group is sending a letter to Energy Secretary Steven Chu and National Nuclear Security Administration head Tom D'Agostino about their concerns.

The group says reasonable alternatives to the project were never analyzed.

The NNSA says it has begun preparing a supplemental analysis for the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement nuclear facility to determine whether a new or supplemental environmental impact statement should be done.

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SANTA FE NEW MEXICAN.com

Group urges case against new facility at LANL

Nonprofit says lab exceeding environmental footprint with planned construction

By Roger Snodgrass | For The New Mexican

7/1/2010

The Los Alamos Study Group is urging the Energy Department to think twice about plans for a new nuclear facility at Los Alamos National Laboratory.

Otherwise, the nonprofit group said it would take legal action, charging the lab with exceeding its environmental footprint on a project which has grown in scope from \$350 million to \$4.2 billion since its impacts were last studied in 2003.

"We hope (the National Nuclear Security Administration) is responsive because it is in their interest to be responsive," Greg Mello, the group's executive director, said Thursday. "But we are prepared to compel compliance, if we can."

The subject of the complaint is the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement Nuclear Facility, which was originally conceived by the laboratory as a replacement for an aging building known as the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research building, but has evolved over time into what the study group describes as a facility "to facilitate the large-scale production of plutonium warhead cores ('pits')."

Jennifer Wagner, a spokeswoman for NNSA, said Thursday afternoon that the agency "is already undertaking a review that will tell us if we need additional (National Environmental Policy Act) analysis."

Noting that NNSA does not comment on potential litigation, she added, "The agency has initiated the process of preparing a supplement analysis for the proposed Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement Nuclear Facility."

Out of that, she said, would come the determination of whether to supplement the existing analysis or to prepare a new environmental impact statement, if any new NEPA documentation is required.

During the news conference, Mello said a private conversation among NNSA officials would not meet the legal standard.

Mello said he doesn't want an analysis "that ratifies a decision already made," he said. "So we want NNSA to stop work on the project."

Mello made public a letter of intent addressed to Energy Secretary Steven Chu and Administrator Thomas D'Agostino of the NNSA. The letter serves formal notice of legal action after 20 days unless a new environmental impact statement is prepared for the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement Nuclear Facility.

Thomas Hnasko, an environmental attorney with Hinkle, Hensley, Shanor & Martin LLP, will serve as the lead lawyer for the plaintiffs. He said he had agreed to analyze the legal basis of the case and file if necessary.

In his opinion, it was obvious that there was very little relationship between the initial project covered by an impact statement in 2003 and the project currently under way.

Among the most obvious changes, in addition to the cost and the significant traffic disruptions announced by the laboratory, were construction requirements, including a concrete and soil grout specification that grew from 6,255 cubic yards to 347,000 cubic yards, or 55 times the original amount for the CMRR project as a whole.

The additional concrete will require an estimated 24,000 dump truck trips to deliver the sand and gravel, a task which is not analyzed in the original statement.

The study group analysis suggests that a new review of alternatives would be unlikely to choose the current plan as the best approach.

Congressional appropriation bills pending approvals increase funding from \$97 million to \$220 million for design work and to begin construction by the end of the next fiscal year.

"We don't want the government to sleepwalk into this huge project," Mello said.

The study group claims to have approximately 2,691 members and supporters who live within a 50-mile radius of LANL and said the group and many of its members "have been intimately involved in analysis and education regarding LANL plutonium infrastructure and programs since October 1989," and many of these members "would be directly harmed by the environmental impacts of CMRR-NF."



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Lab Watchdog Threatening Suit

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Friday, July 02, 2010

Lab Watchdog Threatening Suit

Albuquerque Journal

By Phil Parker, Journal Staff Writer

A nuclear watchdog group is threatening to sue the National Nuclear Security Administration if it goes through with plans to build a massive new plutonium facility at Los Alamos National Laboratory without conducting a fresh analysis of that facility's impact on the environment.

An NNSA spokesperson said Thursday that a supplement analysis of a previous environmental analysis of the lab's proposed Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement building is being prepared. The supplement analysis will determine whether the initial environmental impact statement needs to be updated or whether a new study must be commissioned.

That previous analysis was done in 2003, however, and in the minds of members in the Los Alamos Study Group there is no question: There must be another environmental impact study commissioned, because the project is more than 50 times larger than was envisioned in 2003.

The CMRR is intended to replace the lab's present CMR building, a plutonium lab that dates back to the 1950s. Lab officials have said the work there is vital to national security. Laboratory Deputy Director Ike Richardson said last month "We're in desperate need of an upgrade to that facility."

The new building would house 22,500 square feet of lab space, much of it for analyzing plutonium and other radioactive materials. It would take over a decade to build, and specs call for 122,000 cubic yards of structural concrete. The price tag could be as much as \$4 billion.

LASG's Greg Mello said at a news conference Thursday he doesn't believe the project is necessary, but if the lab is going to build it, new report is needed that better considers the building's size, which has increased dramatically over the previous seven years — and especially since last year.

"It's only recently become apparent how big this is," Mello said.

Mello and other members of LASG expressed concern that any new study might simply be a formality for NNSA.

"We want an EIS (environmental impact study) starting at the beginning — looking at the scope of the project and at alternatives," Mello said. "We don't want a post-hoc analysis that ratifies decisions already made."

Construction could be a ways off. Lab representatives unveiled their plans for the building last month, along with other nearby construction projects along Pajarito Road between Los Alamos and White Rock. They stressed repeatedly that nothing is official until Congress passes a budget with the plans for CMRR building included.

At hearings in April, NNSA officials acknowledged it could be 2012 or 2013 before they will be able to accurately estimate a baseline cost for the building. Both Republicans and Democrats on both House and Senate military affairs committees have indicated that they expect NNSA to justify its funding requests this year, including for the CMRR building.

NNSA Deputy Director of Public Affairs Jennifer Wagner, while declining to discuss potential litigation, said the process is progressing as it should at this point.

"NNSA takes its commitment to environmental stewardship and the state of New Mexico very seriously," she said.

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Activist Group Calls for "Hard Look" at CMRR-NF

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AT LOS ALAMOS ACTIVIST GROUP CALLS FOR 'HARD LOOK' AT CMRR-NF



Nuclear Weapons & Materials Monitor

July 5, 2010

A New Mexico activist group has called on the National Nuclear Security Administration to update its Environmental Impact Statement for the planned Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement-Nuclear Facility, and is threatening to sue to make sure it happens. Citing the significant increase in cost and scope of the multi-billion-dollar project, the Los Alamos Study Group asked the NNSA and Department of Energy in a letter last week to take a look at the impact of the facility on the environment and consider new alternatives before moving forward with what it contends is a vastly different project from when the agency last performed an EIS in 2003. "NNSA has to take a hard look at what has become a completely different and much bigger project than it ever thought of in 2003," Los Alamos Study Group Director Greg Mello said. "What we need now is a more conscious process that can take the agency and Congress off autopilot. Clearly in the last year the project has exploded in costs and ancillary impacts. So the range of alternatives that ought to be on the table is now rather large."

The CMRR-NF is planned to replace Los Alamos' 1950s-era Chemistry and Metallurgy Research facility, relocating and consolidating analytical chemistry, material characterization and actinide research and development work at the lab in support of the agency's plutonium research and pit surveillance activities. As part of the Obama Administration's plans to modernize the nation's weapons complex, the project received a vote of confidence this year as the Administration requested \$225 million for the project in Fiscal Year 2011, more than double the \$97 million it plans to spend in FY2010, but the facility isn't expected to be operational until 2022 and a firm estimate for the project won't be ready until 2014. Construction is slated to start next year, but a lawsuit would delay those plans. Current estimates indicate the facility could cost as much as \$4 billion, up significantly from estimates seven years ago, and the Los Alamos Study Group—which opposes the facility altogether—has suggested there are alternatives that should be studied. If the NNSA doesn't agree to perform an EIS, Mello said the study group will file suit in federal district court to compel the agency to take the action.

NNSA spokeswoman Jennifer Wagner said the agency would not comment on the pending lawsuit, but said a supplement analysis was planned for the proposed facility. "Pursuant to federal regulation, NNSA prepares a supplement analysis to determine whether an existing environmental impact statement should be supplemented, a new environmental impact statement should be prepared or no new NEPA documentation is required," Wagner said in a statement to NW&M Monitor. "NNSA takes its commitment to environmental stewardship and the state of New Mexico very seriously."

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Group threatens lawsuit against lab

4-13-10

By GARRISON WELLS

A Santa Fe citizen's group is threatening to file a lawsuit to force Los Alamos National Laboratory to comply with requirements of a federal environmental act as it moves toward building a \$3.4 billion annex for plutonium warhead cores.

Los Alamos Study Group in a written statement said it will file the lawsuit in federal district court later this month if the National Nuclear Security Administration does not agree to meet requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act.

Jennifer Wagner, NNSA spokeswoman said the NNSA does not comment on potential lawsuits.

However, she added that the agency "has initiated the process of preparing a supplemental analysis for the proposed Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement Nuclear Facility."

"NNSA takes its commitments to environmental stewardship and the state of New Mexico very seriously," she said.

The Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement Nuclear Facility was initially planned to replace the aging Chemistry and Metallurgy Research building at the lab.

According to the group, it would be the largest public infrastructure project in the history of New Mexico since the highway system was built.

The estimated cost of the proposed building has jumped tenfold over the last eight years, the group said and the completion has been delayed 11 years.

Among environmental impacts, the group contends that technical areas in Los Alamos will be affected by construction and local residents will be affected by "lack of access, displaced workers."

"Tens of thousands of heavy trucks will need to traverse local highways," the group said in its statement. "Bypass roads are being studied. Several ancillary structures are required."

"To top it off, this facility will create only a tiny fraction of the rewarding jobs and careers that would be created if the same amount of funds were used to leverage private or state and local investments in renewable energy production, or used to improve energy efficiency and security in homes and businesses across the state," Study Group Director Greg Mello said. "Many of the specialized workers will need to come from out of state and will be temporary."

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It's the Pits, Los Alamos wants to spend billions

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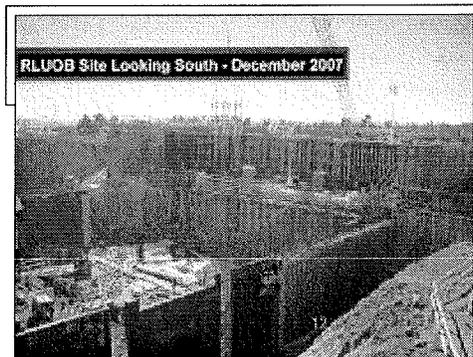


It's the Pits

Los Alamos wants to spend billions for new nuke triggers

July 21, 2010

By Corey Pein



RLUOB Site Looking South - December 2007

Los Alamos Study Group activists plan to sue the government over environmental concerns at the CMRR project. The facility will be LEED-certified, although the plutonium will not. - Courtesy LANL

This year, for the first time, the US government revealed the size of its nuclear weapons arsenal: 5,113 warheads.

That's enough to drop a bomb in every city in the world with more than 100,000 inhabitants and have a few nukes left over—you know, just in case the mutant cannibals on the charred planetary surface roam too close to the survival bunker.

Nearly half of America's nuclear warheads are "operational," or ready-to-fire. On top of those 5,113 operational and reserve warheads, as many as 4,500 retired warheads are sitting around, waiting to be taken apart.

In most of those weapons, the essential piece—the trigger for the deadly mushroom cloud—is known as the "plutonium pit."

The government stores some 14,000 pits at a facility known as Pantex, along Interstate 40 in the Texas panhandle. At Pantex, pits are stacked floor to ceiling.

And yet, a few hundred miles up the road, government contractors have begun moving earth for a multibillion-dollar project that will enable production of up to 200 new plutonium pits a year at Los Alamos National Laboratory.

The great unanswered question is why?

Within that question, there are several smaller whys:

- 1. Why have plans for new pit production at LANL attracted so little local attention, considering the disastrous environmental legacy of the country's last pit production facility, at Rocky Flats in Colorado?**
- 2. Why, given the well-publicized dangers of an earthquake at LANL, does the government want to build an expanded plutonium lab on the same fault line [Cover story, June 30:**

“What’s Next?”]

3. Why does the government need new plutonium pits when it has so many in reserve, and when President Barack Obama speaks of “a world without nuclear weapons?”

Despite at least 10 public forums on the new facility, clear answers aren’t coming from LANL or the Department of Energy’s National Nuclear Security Administration, which oversees the lab.

A LANL spokesman did not return a cell phone message. In an email to SFR, NNSA spokeswoman Jennifer Wagner declines comment on future pit production “because that information is classified.”

This story was pieced together through interviews with anti-nuclear activists and a review of documents from the NNSA, the Defense Department and Congress.

Now, about those whys:

1. Why so few headlines?

LANL works hard to manage public perceptions.

The basic strategy is revealed in an undated PowerPoint presentation on “techniques for the effective spokesperson” by LANL spokesman Kevin Roark. Among Roark’s listed goals: “Maintaining control over story content.”

So far, the lab’s public relations tactics have worked. The language around the new project is, at its worst, an impenetrable acronym soup. At best, the language is euphemistic; officials take pains to avoid the words “plutonium pits,” “warheads” and “weapons.”

Instead, they talk about construction jobs and attracting “the newest and brightest minds,” as LANL Deputy Director Ike Richardson was quoted as saying in the *Journal Santa Fe* last month.

The euphemisms extend to the name of the project itself: the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement project.

In repeated public appearances, NNSA and LANL officials downplay CMRR’s weapons role, noting that it will not be a pit manufacturing facility. Strictly speaking, that’s true—the pits will be manufactured in another building nearby. But it’s also misleading, because without CMRR, there would be no new pits.

A November 2007 report by the non-profit Institute for Defense Analyses, commissioned by US Defense Secretary Robert Gates, explains the connection between CMRR and the future nuclear arsenal: “Applied chemical and metallurgical research capabilities are crucial to...pit manufacturing,” the report says. “The CMRR-NF [nuclear facility] is central to the discussion of pit production capabilities at TA-55,” or Los Alamos Technical Area 55, where pits are now manufactured.

2. Why build on a fault line?

To save money.

As its name suggests, CMRR will replace the lab’s existing Chemistry and Metallurgy Research facility at the same location, which dates from the 1950s. This year, for safety reasons, the old CMR will lose its authorization to operate.

LANL is the most cost-effective site for future pit production in the nation’s nuclear complex, according to the IDA report.

Other alternatives for pit production—including sites in Georgia, Nevada or Texas—would’ve cost up to \$21 billion, the IDA report says.

Be that as it may, NNSA has been unable to provide solid figures to Congress regarding how much CMRR will cost.

Citing "LANL personnel," the IDA report says "an investment of about \$500 million would be needed to maintain a reliable pit production capability at the current level." CMRR promises even greater pit production, for a cost that has ballooned to \$4 billion, according to Obama administration estimates.

The nonprofit Los Alamos Study Group, which is preparing a lawsuit to stop CMRR, believes the project will cost even more, and divert funds from more worthy endeavors.

"This \$4 billion is coming out of renewable energy projects in the state," LASG Operations Director Trish Williams-Mello tells SFR. "Instead of transitioning away from coal, we're going to be dependant on coal because we won't have the money to build renewable infrastructure."

3. Why new pits?

Whoever knows isn't saying.

In 2007, LANL successfully produced the country's first new plutonium pits since Rocky Flats' 1992 closure following a raid by the Environmental Protection Agency and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

LANL now has the capacity to produce 10 to 20 pits a year. With the closure of the old CMR facility this year, that capacity will vanish—at least until the expected completion of CMRR in 2022.

Government scientists estimate most plutonium pits are good for at least 100 years. Since America produced most of its pits in the 1980s, the existing stockpile will likely outlast the expected 50-year life of CMRR.

Nevertheless, the IDA report anticipates a "future pit production requirement [of] 125 per year, with a surge capability of 200."

Granted, the report was written before Obama took office. But CMRR, a \$4 billion-and-counting project that is "central" to new pit production—whether it be 20 or 200 a year—lumbers ahead, with his administration's blessing.

NNSA's Wagner says CMRR is an administration priority "because of the need to modernize our infrastructure" to certify the effectiveness of the nuclear stockpile without live weapons tests.

In April, Obama and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev struck a deal to reduce deployed warheads to 1,550 on each side. Congress has yet to ratify that treaty, known as New Start.

While the treaty would reduce the overall number of deployed nukes, it wouldn't prohibit the development of new types of weapons.

"Where the wiggle room comes in," LASG Executive Director Greg Mello says, is where the government plans "to add new features to the arsenal, of any kind."

A pit designed for one type of weapon cannot be reliably reused in a new, untested weapon. So new pits produced with the help of CMRR could enable the development of nuclear weapons that are larger, smaller or more maneuverable than those in the current arsenal.

Also in the Journal last month, NNSA Site Manager Don Winchell said CMRR will not be designing "fancy new weapons."

But given the project's skyrocketing costs and lack of a clear, non-military research objective, activists say the making of fancy new weapons is the only explanation for CMRR that makes sense.

It's also the most likely answer to that big, \$4 billion question: Why?



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Co-opting the Anti-Nuclear Movement
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Co-opting the Anti-Nuclear Movement

by Darwin BondGraham
July 22, 2010

No medium of propaganda is as powerful and effective as film. Think of the classics, the most notorious efforts to sway the public with the electrifying and collective passion of cinema: racial apartheid was justified in the US with *Birth of a Nation*. The Soviets glorified their revolution with *The Battleship Potemkin*. Then there was *Triumph of the Will*.

A typical propaganda film tugs at emotions and invokes fears. It invokes dark threats to "the people," and it offers up solutions extolling state and corporate power. Unlike a political documentary it will not criticize the state or corporations. Instead it will celebrate great men as our leaders and saviors. Distinct from a run-of-the-mill political documentary, a propaganda film butchers the complexity and contradictions that permeate politics and real life, presenting things in simplistic moral terms. Functionally, propaganda is mobilized to secure popular support for a primary, often hidden agenda that is not apparent in the film's narrative. Propaganda is a tool used by elites to secure the consent of the masses, channeling their anxieties.

Now hitting theaters is one of the most dangerous propaganda films produced in decades. *Countdown to Zero* "traces the history of the atomic bomb from its origins to the present state of global affairs." A promotional blurb on the film's web site claims that it "makes a compelling case for worldwide nuclear disarmament, an issue more topical than ever with the Obama administration working to revive this goal today."



Before I go any further in explaining *Countdown* as a propaganda film I should note that not all propaganda need be the product of a secretive and manipulative council of elites behind some curtain. Instead, the many contributors to *Countdown* and its promotional efforts have different motivations and intentions. What makes this film a coherent piece of propaganda is its medium, style, and likely effects on the US political climate. There are powerful actors who will use it for nefarious ends.

On its surface *Countdown to Zero* is about nuclear disarmament, but deeper down the film is making a very specific case that isn't about disarmament at all. Its political function will prove to be quite different. *Countdown* is joining a suite of political campaigns and other propagandistic efforts, the point of which is to build support for increased US spending on nuclear weapons, as well as a more belligerent foreign policy, based around Islamophobic depictions of "terrorists" and "rogue states." *Countdown* is likely to be used by hawks to drum up support for military action against Iran, North Korea, and other states that would dare to transgress the current near-monopoly that a handful of states have on the bomb.

To understand how this is possible, one has to break through the simplistic and moralizing presentation of issues in the film and its promotional materials, and explore the complex political situation into which it is being launched.

The first and most important thing to understand is that the Obama administration does not have a disarmament agenda. Because the entire moral thrust of the film rests on this notion, it's important to dispel it right off the bat. Obama and his military advisers have made their nuclear ambitions abundantly clear on multiple occasions.

The administration's Nuclear Posture Review in no significant way changed the nuclear force structure or use doctrines. The NPR makes it abundantly clear that US national security is founded on the nuclear "deterrent" and that no one in government will seek to reduce the role of nukes in the foreseeable future.

The recently negotiated New START treaty does not significantly cut the US and Russian arsenals. In fact the treaty language secures an allowance for US "missile defense" programs as well as the "prompt global strike" weapons system while consolidating the US stockpile and reaffirming existing strategic agreements with Russia that are about balance. As noted by Defense Secretary Robert Gates, the irony here is that the Senate's possible ratification of New START is premised on the Obama administration's pledge to fund US nuclear weapons programs upwards of \$180 billion over the next ten years, something even George W. Bush could not accomplish. The down payment for the

next fiscal year includes a \$624 million surge in nuke spending, for a total of \$7.01 billion. The administration foresees spending more than \$1 billion each year to refurbish and upgrade existing warheads and bombs. To support New START requires accepting these huge infrastructural and programmatic investments in nuclear weapons, far into the future.

To put it more simply, the debate in Washington revolves around two camps fighting over how large an increase in nuclear weapons spending there will be. At this point in time all agree on expending billions more. All agree on building a new plutonium pit factory, a new uranium processing facility, a new components factory, and five other major capital projects in the nuclear weapons complex to extend the US nuclear enterprise half a decade or more into the future. Most agree on procuring a new class of nuclear equipped submarines. Most agree on new ballistic missiles. Everyone seems to be fine with upgrading warheads and bombs.

Some conservatives are uncomfortable with the cosmetic cuts to the stockpile that will be made under the auspices of New START. Senate Republicans have circled their wagons to demand greater funding increases in consideration of ratification, and given all of the agreements they have with the Democrats and the Obama administration over expanding the weapons complex, they are actually correct. In order to carry out this bi-partisan nuclear arms buildup, quite a bit more than a \$1 billion per year boost (at its peak) will be needed for the NNSA's budget, especially as inflation eats into the real value of future year budgets.

Determining the future of the US nuclear weapons complex is a tricky balancing act for the foreign policy elite because it is embedded in a larger set of much more important goals. The overriding goal of foreign policy for the United States, with respect to nuclear weapons, is to maintain control of nuclear weapons and materials. Forget lofty ideas like disarmament. Lofty moral oughts only matter with respect to the realpolitik of geo-strategy (and this is where *Countdown* comes in, as we shall see).

To elite strategists who will decide at the end of the day, the power of nuclear weapons only matter within, and comprise a small part of, a much greater geopolitical game. Henry Kissinger made this very point in 1957 with his first book, the subject being the role of nuclear weapons in US foreign policy. Controlling resources, energy supplies, and access to geo-strategic regions for US corporations and allies is the primary goal of US foreign policy, and this requires a stable imbalance of powers, with the US the weightier.

Nuclear weapons are problematic today because they remain a necessary means of overpowering other nations and intimidating foes, but they have also become a liability as other states threaten to go nuclear in order to restore balance to a unipolar world. A blatant display of American hypocrisy is seen as a major weakness for the maintenance of American power by liberal imperialists like Obama. Conservatives like Senator Jon Kyl would rather just avoid soft power altogether and stick to a hard-nosed defense policy.

This is why US policy with respect to Iran seems so disjointed and paralyzed. Iran possesses immense energy resources, it straddles a region of geo-strategic importance, and its influence and power is growing. For US elites, Iran must be controlled at all cost. A nuclear Iran would make this much, much more difficult. Regime change is the goal, just like in Iraq. Nonproliferation as an end in itself seems to offer the most justifiable reason for using force and "rebuilding" nations (remember that it was the reason given for the 2003 invasion and ongoing occupation of Iraq). But with its Bush-era reputation of seeking new nukes, liberals fear, the United States can hardly coerce or attack Iran in the name of nonproliferation. The US being the world's preeminent nuclear power with no interest in disarming, that would be bald hypocrisy. But then again the US will not disarm, for this would be anathema to the needs and goals of the foreign policy elite. What to do?

Into this mix arrives *Countdown to Zero* and similarly crafted propaganda pieces. *Countdown's* major achievement is repackaging the strategy of anti-nuclear nuclearism into a sexy and thrilling propaganda film full of special effects and heart-pulsing music. It will invoke fear of nuclear weapons to justify aggression, war, and the extension of US control over much of the rest of the world.

While the film's title and a lot of the fanfare surrounding it emphasizes the "zero" message of disarmament, *Countdown* is actually an alarmist portrayal of dark-skinned men, Muslims, "terrorists," and other racial or ethnic bogeymen who we are told, over the span of 90 minutes, are seeking nuclear weapons to use against the American people. A related theme in the film is the demonization of Iran and North Korea which are portrayed as dangerous rogue states with ties to terrorist organizations, and who must be controlled, against whom military action may be warranted -- or else. Or else what?

One of the main "experts" in *Countdown to Zero*, Joseph Cirincione frames the take home message at the outset by invoking a very post-9-11 Bush administration theme:

"That day changed our sense of security and how we view the world. We learned how vulnerable we are to the destructive acts of a determined few. Just think how worse it would have been if the terrorist had nuclear weapons."

Cirincione is not just any expert. He is the doyen of the Democratic Party's NGO apparatus that shapes nuclear weapons policy through foundation funding of grassroots groups and elite policy shops. Cirincione is president of the Ploughshares Fund. In spite of its name, Ploughshares' mission these days actually involves beating ploughs into swords.

Throughout the 1990s, but especially during the George W. Bush years, Ploughshares and its circle of foundations called the Peace and Security Funders Group increasingly narrowed the range of acceptable anti-nuclear activism, while simultaneously ghettoizing the field so that the work of various NGOs became less and less applicable to social justice and economic development issues, and increasingly focused on abstract global problems and hypotheticals, such as the possible use of nuclear weapons. In the process, discussions of the injustices of the global political economy and how nuclear weapons fit into it were silenced. Anti-nuclear activism became increasingly specialized, boring, and disconnected from issues that affect people's everyday lives. Arms control eclipsed abolition as the rallying cry. Those NGOs that obeyed the consolidation period survived with funding and access to media, so long as they kissed the ring.

Ploughshares was at the center of it all. Today the Fund's priorities are shaped by its board of directors made up of Democratic Party donors, other foundation executives, and liberal academics. The Fund's advisers include men like George Shultz, the former Bechtel president who served as Reagan's Secretary of State, and former Defense Secretaries William Cohen and William Perry. The last is actually a board member of the for-profit corporations that manage the nation's two nuclear weapons labs, Los Alamos and Livermore. You figure it out.

Ploughshares' adviser and propagandist Jeff Skoll is president of Participant Media, one of the production companies behind *Countdown to Zero*. The film's co-producer, the World Security Institute (a major recipient of Ploughshares Fund dollars), tapped its Global Zero project membership to narrate the film through dozens of interviews with the likes of elder statesmen and NGO executives like Cirincione who are very friendly to the Obama administration's nuclear buildup.

Participant Media is a full service propaganda shop for liberal campaigns, producing both documentaries and dramas. In addition to the benchmark documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth*, Participant is responsible for some very excellent and thoughtful films like *Syriana*, *Food, Inc.*, and *The Cove*. And this is where complexity comes in. Some of the producers and voices featured in *Countdown to Zero* have wonderful intentions, and all of them are probably genuinely concerned with, and fear, the possible day that nuclear weapons might be used, whether by a state or by a criminal group. Herein also is the propagandistic danger of *Countdown to Zero*.

Albert Camus once wrote that "the evil that is in the world almost always comes of ignorance, and good intentions may do as much harm as malevolence if they lack understanding." Backed with a lot of foundation money, the producers of *Countdown to Zero* have paid organizers across the US to do considerable outreach for the film, whipping up interest on Facebook and other social media and generally co-opting the energies and intentions of many anti-nuclear activists. *Countdown* premieres July 23 and will be shown in theaters across the US. Many screenings are being organized by activists whose intentions are unimpeachable, if naive.

What audiences are going to learn from *Countdown to Zero* is that nuclear weapons are a threat today because the bad guys might get a hold of them. They'll learn that al-Qaeda is seeking nuclear weapons, which is their sworn duty; that highly enriched uranium is easy to smuggle; that "we are on the verge of a nuclear 9-11"; that tens of thousands of pounds of uranium are stored under virtually no security around the globe. In other words they'll learn that dark scary men, Muslims, "terrorists," and anarchists are trying to kill them with nuclear weapons, and that nations like Iran and North Korea will gladly assist them. Their feelings of revulsion for nuclear weapons will be stimulated and channeled against these dark enemies of civilization.

What they'll learn about US nuclear weapons and policy, if it is discussed in any real and honest depth at all, is that better control and management is needed, a slightly smaller arsenal is desirable. But mostly they'll learn to just trust our leaders: everything will turn out alright so long as the proper authorities are in power. Joseph Cirincione will eagerly explain to audiences that George Shulz, Henry Kissinger, William Perry, and Sam Nunn are hard at work to "secure" our nuclear weapons. It all sounds great, but the "four horsemen," as they have come to be known, are actually among the biggest lobbyists for the surge in nuclear weapons spending and the construction of a new US nuclear weapons complex.

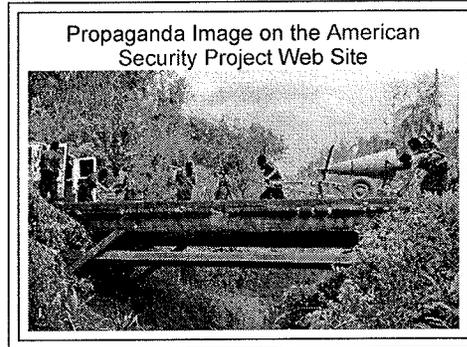
In a promotional video attached to the START ratification effort Cirincione urges viewers to "join this patriotic consensus" toward zero. In a recent op-ed, he has urged Senate ratification of New START, writing, "The statesmanship demonstrated by the Consensus members today could help break the partisan blockade in the Senate and restore America's leadership on this urgent security challenge." The capital C Consensus he's referring to is a newly formed NGO, created to translate the groundswell of public response they expect from propaganda efforts like *Countdown to Zero*, into sharp policy programs for government, including aggressive military action against would-be nuclear states, much of it in the name of nonproliferation. The Consensus for American Security is one manifestation of the platform that many foreign policy elites hope will solve the contradiction in current US nuclear policy. The mission statement of the Consensus includes, "strengthening and modernizing America's nuclear security," because it "is a vital element of protecting the United States and its allies."

Ploughshares put up the money for The Consensus for American Security . . . an organization dedicated to strengthening and modernizing America's nuclear security. Modernizing is not an arbitrary word. In the current policy debate over the future of the US nuclear weapons complex and stockpile, modernization means a very specific thing. It means approving the Obama administration's program to build a pit factory, a uranium processing facility, a components plant, and other billion-dollar capital projects for the weapons complex. It also means modernizing warheads and bombs by rebuilding them and designing new features. And it means acquiring new, very expensive platforms like subs, bombers, and missiles.

Members of the Ploughshares Consensus include a predictable list of centrist retired military brass and statesmen, most of whom occupy revolving door positions on other foundation and NGO boards like Ploughshares, and more than a few of whom have links to the military industrial complex: George Shulz, Samuel Berger, Vice Admiral Lee Gunn, and physicist Sidney Drell, all of them strong supporters of US nuclear weapons programs and American empire.

The Consensus's second mission appears to involve stoking Islamophobia. A special project of the Consensus, the American Security Project, is a well-funded think tank churning out reports about "al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula," and "Are We Winning? Measuring Progress in the Struggle Against al Qaeda and Associate Movements." ASP's homepage features a photograph of "terrorists" in black masks hauling an American nuclear warhead (a W-76 or W-88 it appears) on a bamboo rickshaw over a wooden bridge toward a waiting van in some distant jungle.

Countdown to Zero is one component of a larger and coherent foundation campaign to stoke up public fears about nuclear weapons for the purpose of extending a near-monopoly on nuclear weapons, and legitimating a more aggressive foreign policy aimed at regime change in Iran and elsewhere. The consensus behind those who funded and produced the film has little to do with disarmament, and a lot to do with stabilizing the American empire.



Darwin BondGraham is a board member of the Los Alamos Study Group, a disarmament, energy, and economic development organization based in Albuquerque, N.M. See, also, "The US-Russia START Treaty: Just What Does 'Arms Control' Really Mean?" (*MRZine*, 20 May 2010).

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"Countdown to Zero" Eclipses Those on the Frontlines of Disarmament

By Russ Wellen, August 2, 2010

The acclaimed new film *Countdown to Zero* may serve the purpose of alerting neophytes to the full extent of the danger of nuclear weapons. But for others, it's best viewed while wearing a hazmat suit. Activist and cutting-edge disarmament commentator Darwin BondGraham explains at Monthly Review's MRZine:

On its surface *Countdown to Zero* is about nuclear disarmament, but deeper down the film . . . is actually an alarmist portrayal of dark-skinned men, Muslims, "terrorists," and other racial or ethnic bogeymen who we are told, over the span of 90 minutes, are seeking nuclear weapons to use against the American people. A related theme in the film is the demonization of Iran and North Korea which are portrayed as dangerous rogue states with ties to terrorist organizations . . . against whom military action may be warranted -- or else.

If it's not the likes of filmmaker Lucy Walker or, by implication, the Global Zero project of the World Security Institute, which is behind *Countdown to Zero*, that (wo)mans the frontlines of disarmament, then who or what is? Is it? How about Ploughshares and its president Joseph Cirincione?

BondGraham's piece kind of spoiled them for me: "In a promotional video attached to the START ratification effort, Cirincione urges viewers to 'join this patriotic consensus' toward zero." Then, in an op-ed Cirincione wrote, "The statesmanship demonstrated by the Consensus members today could help break the partisan blockade in the Senate and restore America's leadership on this urgent security challenge."

Wait, how did "consensus" go from lower-case "c" to capitalized? BondGraham writes: "The capital C Consensus he's referring to is a newly formed NGO, created to translate the groundswell of public response they expect from" *Countdown to Zero*, among other things, into policies such as "aggressive military action against would-be nuclear states, much of it in the name of nonproliferation." Funded by Ploughshares, the Consensus for American Security calls for "'strengthening and modernizing America's nuclear security,' because it 'is a vital element of protecting the United States and its allies.'"

Modernizing, BondGraham points out, "is not an arbitrary word. [It] means a very specific thing . . . approving the Obama administration's program to build a pit factory, a uranium processing facility," rebuilding "warheads and bombs" and "acquiring new, very expensive platforms like subs, bombers, and missiles."

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That's Darwin BondGraham -- never one to shy away from the task of turning the world of nuclear disarmament on its head.

If the frontlines of disarmament be not there, perhaps they're in Congress, to which the Obama administration is taking the battle for START ratification. In the *New York Times* Peter Baker reports: "With time running out . . . the White House is trying to reach an understanding with Senate Republicans to approve its new arms control treaty with Russia. . . . The critical player is Senator Jon Kyl of Arizona, the Republican whip [who] has sought to modernize the nuclear force." An analyst asked if the administration is "willing to pay the price he's asking in light of what they want to do" in the area of disarmament. "So far, administration officials say they are willing to pay that price because they are also committed to modernization."

You can be forgiven for wondering where the "dis" in disarmament is here. Perhaps then the frontlines of disarmament look more like the Plowshares Nuclear Resistance? Founded by, among others, the Berrigan brothers, it's still active (however long in the tooth its members are).

In November of 2009, it approached the Kitsap-Bangor Trident submarine base near Seattle, Washington. Ranging in age from 60 to 83, five members entered through the perimeter fence and cut through two more fences, while splashing around animal blood. They also hammered on the roadways and fences as well as scattered sunflower seeds. Once apprehended, they were handcuffed, hooded, and kept on the ground face-down for four hours. Though eventually released, they were liable to charges of trespass and destruction of government property.

While it's easy to write them off as throwbacks another time and poke fun at their idea of symbolism, in fact, such acts accomplish little. For starters, the public is notoriously disapproving of anything resembling vandalism.

Thus, even the perimeter fences of a submarine base aren't the front lines of disarmament. The honor goes to the those groups that act as watchdogs on behalf of the public for U.S. national laboratories such as Los Alamos and Lawrence Livermore.

For instance, Livermore watchdog Tri-Valley CAREs (Communities Against a Radioactive Environment) claims that the true plans of the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) are significantly at variance with the agency's public pronouncements, not to mention disarmament. Working with Tri-Valley CAREs, former Livermore official Roger Logan points to the difference it makes when the laboratories are run by a limited liability company (which includes the University of California and the Bechtel Corporation), as they are now, instead of the government, as once they were.

In a Tri-Valley CAREs press release, he said, "The people running the Livermore and Los Alamos management contracts have made careers out of inflating cost estimates, and NNSA either lacks the skill or the will to properly steward the billions of taxpayer dollars it requests each year."

Meanwhile, Greg Mello of Los Alamos watchdog the Los Alamos Study Group tells us that \$3.4 billion of the proposed \$16 billion in new warhead spending is to be allotted to the construction of a Chemistry and Metallurgy Research facility. Its purpose is to construct new nuclear "pits" (where the chain reaction begins).

In a Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists piece, Mello writes that, at 270,000-square-feet, the new facility "would add only 22,500-square-feet of additional plutonium processing and lab space to [Los Alamos's] existing 59,600-square-

linked to a new enclosure movement.

MORE

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feet of comparable space." That "works out to \$151,000 per square foot, or \$1,049 per square inch." Holy (watch your tax dollars go up in) smoke!

Especially since "there is already a surfeit of backup pits [which] will last for many decades to come." The new facility "would increase production capacity to an even more absurd level." In fact, he writes, every aspect of the project, "from the mission itself to the practicality of the building design, should be questioned far more deeply than Congress has done to date."

To give you an idea of how the Los Alamos Study Group works as a watchdog, BondGraham (also with the Los Alamos Study Group) wrote in a press release, "Earlier this year we finally obtained enough information from [the Department of Energy] and its contractors to confidently determine that the increased cost, greatly expanded construction requirements, and qualitatively new environmental impacts that make the [Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement] different [from what] was originally analyzed." Thus: "On July 1 we formally notified the U.S. Department of Energy of our intent to seek a new Environmental Impact Statement, and to pursue an injunction against [the] Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement [facility]."

This is what life on the frontlines looks like: poring over the books and seeking injunctions. It's not an administration merrily conjuring up new concessions for the nuclear-industrial complex, nor is it disarmament groups of dubious provenance. Neither is it op-ed writers nor bloggers like this author. Instead, it's those who, to cite Tri-Valley CARES' slogan, are engaged in "Stopping nuclear weapons where they start."

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Jack Cohen-Joppa

Dear Russ,

While you may disapprove of "anything resembling vandalism," it is worth noting that juries, when presented with and permitted by a judge to consider the facts of international law regarding nuclear weapons and the responsibility of citizens, have repeatedly acquitted disarmament activists. See Francis Boyle's *Protesting Power: War, Resistance and Law*.

Nonviolent direct action is an alternate avenue to the civil suit for accessing the courts. Activists risk punishment (and the disapprobation of bloggers) to secure a public platform where they can speak about the reality of nuclear weapons in a way much of the public never reads or hears, and articulate the rationale for civil resistance in opposition to criminal activities of the state.

A truly comprehensive strategy for nuclear disarmament would study, exploit and incorporate the potentials of civil resistance as much as civil litigation, but such a strategy is difficult to forge when acts of civil resistance are so quickly dismissed as anachronistic by many career activists. The failure of those engaged in civil resistance to achieve nuclear disarmament would be comparable to the same failure of career "arms control" activists - except the latter squandered a bigger budget and more access to power.

One reasonable speculation is that federal prosecutors have declined to charge the

knoxnews.com blogs » Frank Munger's Atomic City Underground



Suit seeks to stop work on CMRR at Los Alamos

The Los Alamos Study Group announced today that it had filed a suit in Federal Court in Albuquerque, N.M., seeking to halt further design and other activities on a plutonium processing facility known as the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement (CMRR) project at Los Alamos National Lab.

The group claims that the National Nuclear Security Administration, a part of the Dept. of Energy, is violating the law by proceeding with plans for the big project -- estimated to cost in the range of \$4 billion -- without an updated and currently relevant environmental impact statement.

Some of the points being made in the lawsuit may ultimately have application to a similarly sized nuclear weapons project -- the Uranium Processing Facility -- at the Y-12 National Security Complex in Oak Ridge. The Oak Ridge Environmental Peace Alliance has said some important issues related to the UPF, including construction of a haul road and destruction of wetlands, were not identified in the draft Site Wide Environmental Impact Statement for Y-12.

In today's press release and other reports issued in recent weeks, the Los Alamos Study Group argued that CMRR is not needed and emphasized that the federal agency has significantly changed the plans since the original replacement project at LANL was proposed several years back.

In a statement released in conjunction with the legal complaint, Greg Mello, director of the New Mexico group that pushes nuclear disarmament on multiple fronts, said the time for "cozy internal review" had passed.

"Everyone knows the project's costs, challenges and impacts have exploded, and many parties, including NNSA and congressional committees, are starting to worry that the project has gotten too big, too expensive, and too risky. The underground behemoth NNSA now proposes to build bears little resemblance to the light, above-ground structure proposed in 2003."

Mello said a supplemental environmental review of previous work would not suffice.

The Los Alamos Study Group says it represents nearly 2,700 members and supporters living near or relatively near to the national lab.

Posted by Frank Munger on August 16, 2010 at 8:48 PM | 

About this blog

Senior Writer Frank Munger covers the Dept. of Energy's Oak Ridge facilities and many related topics — nuclear weapons, nuclear waste and other things nuclear, environmental cleanup and science of all sorts. Atomic City Underground is, first and foremost, a news blog, but there's room for analysis, opinion and random thoughts that have no place else to go. Contact Frank.



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Group files suit to halt LANL nuke facility

By Roger Snodgrass | For The New Mexican

8/16/2010

Funding for a \$4 billion plutonium processing facility at Los Alamos National Laboratory is well into the home stretch with a \$325 million installment now pending in Congress and a long-term commitment almost in hand.

After two decades and four presidents since the idea was first proposed, \$289 million has already been invested in building the Chemistry and Metallurgy Replacement Research-Nuclear Facility, Los Alamos National Laboratory's biggest project since World War II.

With that end in view, laboratory officials now face another challenge — The Los Alamos Study Group on Monday filed for an injunction to halt the project until its environmental paperwork more clearly resembles its expanded dimensions.

The environmental impact statement for an earlier version of the facility was written in 2003, according to the study group. "At that time, the facility was to cost one-tenth as much, use one-fiftieth as much concrete, take one-fourth the time to build and entail far fewer environmental impacts," it announced as the lawsuit was filed in U.S. District Court in Albuquerque.

The CMRR has been endorsed by the Obama administration and key members of Congress. The CMRR also was recommended under the Nuclear Posture Review, the nation's central statement of its nuclear weapon policy.

NNSA spokeswoman Jennifer Wagner said in a response that the agency does not comment on pending legislation, but that it has undertaken a supplemental analysis to determine if the EIS should be amended or a new one should be prepared.

Among the questions left unanswered by the NNSA is what effect the legal uncertainty might have in current operations and schedules.

The embattled CMRR facility began as a modern replacement for the lab's antiquated Chemistry and Metallurgy Research facility, but the building began to take on new dimensions over time.

At one point during the Bush administration, a Modern Pit Facility was proposed for Los Alamos, where plutonium handling in the nuclear weapons complex would be consolidated and where new plutonium triggers, known as pits, would be manufactured for modernizing the nuclear weapons stockpile.

Many features of the new facility, including its enlarged capability for plutonium processing, can be traced back to the Modern Pit Facility, including the decision to locate it next to the Plutonium Facility, where an advanced security perimeter is already in place and where a modest program of pit production has begun. The lab maintains that pit processing would continue to take place in the Plutonium Facility, although the two buildings would be linked by tunnel.

Under the Nuclear Policy Review, 50-80 pits per year could be made at Los Alamos, but another concern for the study group is that the evolving design plans have embraced a "hotel concept" which would enable plans to change to encompass unknown future capabilities.

"In a nutshell, NNSA changed the project to which it had committed without telling anyone, and without environmental analysis of alternatives, either to the project, to its design, or to its construction methods," said Greg Mello, executive director of the study group.

Meanwhile the record of LANL presentations on the CMRR makes clear that firm costs have yet to be established, but estimates have mushroomed from a few hundred million to \$4.2 billion.

The price tag opens the question of more effective alternatives that may be possible, but that were not considered under the much smaller costs anticipated years ago.

Many factors have influenced the rising costs in recent years. A Bush administration emphasis on securing nuclear facilities called for a project that would be largely underground, but that aggravated seismic issues that arose, which in turn pushed the excavation from 50 feet to 125 feet and will require 225,000 cubic yards of concrete and grout for a foundation.

Far from being on the verge of becoming a reality, Mello said today, "The project never recovered after finding out that the ground on which it sits literally can't support its own weight." As a nuclear facility in an earthquake zone, that makes the whole project almost impossible, he added.

Contact Roger Snodgrass at reoger.sno@gmail.com.

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The Augusta Chronicle (Georgia)

August 17, 2010 Tuesday
ALL EDITION

ACROSS THE U.S.

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Watchdog group sues to halt plutonium site

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. - A watchdog group has filed suit in federal court to halt a multibillion-dollar plutonium building planned at Los Alamos National Laboratory until an environmental study can be done.

The Los Alamos Study Group lawsuit alleges the U.S. Department of Energy and the National Nuclear Security Administration have violated the Environmental Protection Act by preparing to build the Chemical and Metallurgy Replacement Nuclear Facility without a new environmental impact statement.

The Study Group says the facility is meant only to increase the production capacity for the cores of nuclear weapons, known as pits. But it says NNSA has no pit production mission.

In other news

A federal judge ruled Monday that Missouri laws restricting protests near funerals are unconstitutional. Legislators passed two laws in 2006 in response to protests at service members' funerals by members of Westboro Baptist Church of Topeka, Kan. The church contends the deaths are God's punishment for the U.S. tolerating homosexuality. The judge ruled the laws violate the right of free speech.

- Associated Press

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LOS ALAMOS STUDY GROUP



Plutonium building at Los Alamos needs study

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The Examiner

Watchdog group: Plutonium building at Los Alamos lab needs environmental study

By: SUE MAJOR HOLMES

Associated Press

08/17/10 6:30 AM PDT

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. — A watchdog group filed suit Monday in federal court to halt a multibillion-dollar plutonium building planned at Los Alamos National Laboratory until an environmental study can be done.

The Los Alamos Study Group's lawsuit alleges the U.S. Department of Energy and the National Nuclear Security Administration violated the Environmental Protection Act by preparing to build the Chemical and Metallurgy Replacement Nuclear Facility without a new environmental impact statement.

The Study Group said CMRR's Nuclear Facility is meant only to increase the production capacity for the cores of nuclear weapons, known as pits. But it says NNSA has no pit production mission.

Los Alamos lab officials have said the facility would replace a 58-year-old lab where scientists analyze samples of plutonium and other radioactive materials and would be needed for other science, even if Los Alamos didn't do pit production.

Jennifer Wagner, an NNSA spokeswoman, said the agency doesn't comment on pending litigation.

She said NNSA is preparing a supplement analysis for the nuclear facility, a process that determines whether an existing environmental impact statement should be supplemented, a new environmental impact statement should be prepared or no new documents are required.

NNSA did an environmental statement in November 2003 for an earlier version of the project, but the Study Group contends the facility has substantially changed since then and would have greater environmental impact.

The lawsuit said a sitewide environmental impact statement that NNSA published in April 2008 did not describe or analyze the facility now proposed.

"The underground behemoth NNSA now proposes to build bears little resemblance to the light, above-ground structure proposed in 2003. Any supplemental analysis of the existing plan falls far short of what the law requires," Study Group director Greg Mello said.

The lawsuit also said the design was changed without notice or opportunity for public comment.

Mello said there's "a lot of political and bureaucratic momentum behind the project," but "we think the government needs a kind of timeout to reconsider this project in a more calm and objective way."

The project consists of two buildings. A radiological laboratory and office building is finished and is being equipped. The other structure, CMRR's Nuclear Facility, is expected to begin construction next year but would not be completed for a decade, the lawsuit said.

There's no exact cost figure for CMRR, but a 2008 Senate report estimated it at \$2.6 billion — more than five times the initial estimate. The cost will be calculated after a final design for the facility.

The Los Alamos Study Group contends the project would cost \$4 billion and that there are simpler, cheaper and less environmentally damaging alternatives.

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NATURE NEWS BLOG

Suit filed against Los Alamos

17 Aug 2010 | 17:35 BST | Posted by Geoffrey Brumfiel | Category: Uncategorized

A non-profit watchdog has filed a suit to stop the construction of a new, US\$4 billion weapons facility at Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico.

The Los Alamos Study Group claims that the new facility, known as the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement (CMRR) project has violated federal law by failing to produce an Environmental Impact Statement. The lab's overseers produced an impact statement for an earlier version of the facility in 2003, but the group claims that the CMRR has been extensively redesigned and the old document no longer applies.



The new facility, which would be capable of producing plutonium triggers, or "pits", for hydrogen bombs, has sparked fears amongst many arms control activists of reviving (or appearing to revive) a nuclear arms race. A nice sceptic's view can be read in this article from the local *Santa Fe Reporter*. And a lively discussion about the modernizing the arsenal and its implications for arms control can be found on the always informative Arms Control Wonk.

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LOS ALAMOS STUDY GROUP



Suit Targets Plutonium Lab

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also in the main Albuquerque Journal

Tuesday, August 17, 2010

Suit Targets Plutonium Lab

By John Fleck

Journal Staff Writer

Federal officials need to consider alternatives to building a multibillion dollar plutonium laboratory in Los Alamos, as costs have increased more than sixfold over the last decade, according to a lawsuit filed Monday in federal court.

The project, the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement Nuclear Facility, is still in the design phase, with completion not expected for a decade. Projected costs have increased since 2004, while the need for the nuclear weapons work to be done in the lab has changed with changes in U.S. nuclear weapons policy, according to the suit by the Los Alamos Study Group.

A study of alternatives to the project published in 2003 as required by the National Environmental Policy Act is inadequate given the changes that have happened in the years since, the Albuquerque-based nuclear weapons program critics allege in their lawsuit.

The suit calls the 2003 Environmental Impact Statement "obsolete and inadequate."

National Nuclear Security Administration officials declined comment on the suit, but issued a statement saying there is currently a review under way to determine if a new Environmental Impact Statement will be required.

Greg Mello, the study group's director, called the current review being conducted by the National Nuclear Security Administration too little, too late.

"The time for an internal analysis of whether to do a new environmental impact statement passed a couple of years ago," Mello said in an interview Monday.

In the past, similar lawsuits have delayed nuclear projects, including a major nuclear weapons X-ray machine built at Los Alamos in the mid-1990s.

The new plutonium laboratory would replace the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research building, where Los Alamos workers have studied samples of dangerously radioactive plutonium and other materials since it opened in 1952.

Independent federal safety auditors have concluded that the old building is a danger to workers and the public, but more than two decades of effort to upgrade or replace it have so far failed because of shifting government priorities.

The project's latest incarnation, the subject of Mello's suit, dates to 1999, when federal officials abandoned plans to upgrade the existing Chemistry and Metallurgy Research building and began considering construction of a replacement.

In 2003, the federal government published a lengthy environmental impact statement on the project. Such studies are required by the National Environmental Policy Act, a 1969 law that requires federal agencies to formally review alternatives to their proposed projects, along with the environmental impacts of the proposed action and its alternatives, including the option of doing nothing.

Based on that study, the National Nuclear Security Administration approved proceeding with the project in 2004, estimating its cost at \$600 million. Since that time, the project has had to be redesigned because of new concerns about earthquake risks. That redesign is still under way, and officials say they do not yet know its final costs. But an estimate published earlier this year put the current cost at more than \$4 billion.

In the lawsuit and an interview, Mello argued that the situation today, because of the redesign and higher costs, is substantially different than it was in 2003, prompting the need for a new environmental analysis.

The lawsuit also argues that one of the building's original purposes, assisting in the manufacture of new plutonium cores for nuclear weapons, is no longer being contemplated. The suit notes a 2006 study by a group of federal science advisers that concluded the plutonium cores in the current arsenal should last in excess of 100 years.

Without that requirement, less expensive and environmentally damaging options are available, which were not considered in the 2003 environmental impact statement, according to the suit.

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Defense Daily

August 18, 2010 Wednesday

Greens Sue To Stop New Plutonium Plant At Los Alamos Lab

SECTION: Vol. 247 No. 34

LENGTH: 1322 words

By George Lobsenz

In a lawsuit that revealed surprising new details about the controversial and politically sensitive \$4 billion project, a New Mexico antinuclear group this week asked a federal court to stop construction of a massive new plutonium facility at Los Alamos National Laboratory until the Energy Department conducts a new environmental review to assess major changes in the plant's design and apparent plans to cap nearby radioactive waste sites with volcanic ash excavated at the plant site.

The Sante Fe-based Los Alamos Study Group said in a complaint filed Monday in U.S. District Court for the District of New Mexico that DoE and its semi-autonomous weapons agency, the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA), are continuing to rely on a 2003 environmental review despite huge changes in the planned size and scope of the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement Nuclear Facility (CMRR-NF) over the past seven years.

In particular, due to increased security and earthquake safety requirements, the lawsuit said NNSA years ago abandoned its 2003-vintage plan for a relatively small above-ground facility and is now contemplating a far larger underground structure that would require digging down 125 feet to remove a 50-foot-thick layer of volcanic ash under the project site.

The lawsuit said the removal of the ash is necessary because it could significantly shift during an earthquake, potentially destabilizing the CMRR-NF, which will hold several tons of plutonium for nuclear weapons production.

And in what appeared to be a new disclosure, the lawsuit said DoE and NNSA are considering using the estimated 400,000 cubic yards of excavated volcanic ash to cap two old waste disposal sites at Los Alamos that contain 14 million cubic feet of nuclear and chemical residues left over from past nuclear weapons research at the lab.

The lawsuit, pointing out that the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires federal agencies to review the environmental impacts of "major" federal actions, noted:

"The decision to leave 14 million cubic feet of nuclear and chemical waste in shallow unlined disposal pits covered by this material would be a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment, with far-reaching impacts."

The lawsuit also disclosed that NNSA officials--without any public review--have revamped the design of the CMRR-NF so it can serve as a multi-functional "hotel" for a range of unspecified nuclear weapons activities. The lawsuit said the "hotel" concept appears to provide less usable floor space than past building designs while vastly increasing the size and cost of the project, requiring 20 times more steel and concrete than older designs.

More fundamentally, the lawsuit said DoE and NNSA have violated NEPA by failing to conduct a new review to look at the environmental impacts of the far larger CMRR-NF they are now planning--a facility that was never contemplated in the environmental impact statement (EIS) conducted by the agencies in 2003 when they first looked at replacing the current Chemistry and Metallurgy Research (CMR) facility at Los Alamos, which is outdated and dangerously vulnerable to earthquake damage.

The lawsuit noted that NNSA has repeatedly acknowledged to Congress--and to the Los Alamos Study Group in a July 30

letter--that the design and scope of the CMRR-NF have changed dramatically.

"However, [DoE and NNSA] have never analyzed their substantially changed nuclear facility project, with its additional project elements and its greatly expanded environmental impacts, in any EIS," the lawsuit said. "As a result, [DoE and NNSA] have been and are continuing to implement a novel nuclear facility project which differs substantially from, and has significantly different environmental impacts than, any alternative analyzed in any EIS, including the 2003 CMRR EIS."

Greg Mello, head of the Los Alamos Study Group, suggested DoE and NNSA officials wanted to avoid doing an EIS for the project because it would fully expose the huge cost, building design issues--and the rationale for the massive structure--to public debate.

He noted that the Senate Armed Services Committee and other congressional panels had recently expressed concern about the increasing size and cost of the CMRR-NF, and the armed services panel had urged an independent review of the project, presumably because lawmakers no longer trusted NNSA assessments of the secretive initiative.

"The time for cozy internal review has past," Mello said in a statement. "Everyone knows the project's costs, challenges, and impacts have exploded, and many parties, including NNSA and congressional committees, are starting to worry that the project has gotten too big, too expensive and too risky."

NNSA officials responded to the lawsuit by saying they were in the process of determining whether they needed to conduct a new EIS for the CMRR-NF project, whether they could update the 2003 analysis with a more limited supplemental analysis or whether any new environmental review was needed.

Mello said a supplement to the 2003 EIS clearly be inadequate in light of the major design changes made to the CMRR-NF that was reviewed in 2003. He also argued that NNSA should embrace a full EIS to clarify its thinking on the project--particularly whether such a large new facility is really needed to maintain the nation's nuclear weapons production capability.

"The underground behemoth NNSA now proposes to build bears little resemblance to the light, above-ground structure proposed in 2003," Mello said. "Any 'supplemental' analysis of the existing plan falls far short of what the law requires and what all parties--especially NNSA--badly need.

"We believe NNSA will see the value of reassessing this project through a new NEPA analysis," he continued. "NEPA's procedural requirements exist to help federal decision-makers. If NNSA had followed the law, the agency would not be squandering so much money on this facility now. NNSA should halt further investment in the project and conduct a new NEPA analysis beginning with an objective, open review of better alternatives."

Mello and other antinuclear groups contend the CMRR-NF is unnecessary because the nation's nuclear arsenal is shrinking fast, meaning NNSA will not have to manufacture any new plutonium pits for warheads. The critics point out that nuclear weapons experts have told NNSA that current pits in warheads face no significant age-related degradation for decades, undermining NNSA's main argument for building a robust new CMRR-NF.

However, NNSA and the Obama administration contend the CMRR-NF is critical to efforts to downsize the U.S. nuclear arsenal because the nation currently has no sizable pit production capability in case new warheads are needed in the future.

In addition, the CMRR-NF is a political linchpin in Obama's strategy to win Senate Republican votes for a new nuclear weapons reduction pact with Russia by promising vast new investment in the U.S. nuclear weapons complex. GOP senators say they will not vote for the pact unless Obama shows he is serious about modernizing U.S. warhead production capabilities.

However, even current and past NNSA officials have expressed concern in recent days about the mushrooming cost of the CMRR-NF and the proposed Uranium Processing Facility at DoE's Y-12 site in Tennessee, which is expected to cost as much as \$3.5 billion.

The New Mexico lawsuit noted that Los Alamos Director Michael Anastasio told the Senate Armed Services Committee July 15 that he feared weapons science activities at his lab might be "squeezed" to provide money for the two huge new production facilities.

Similarly, former NNSA Deputy Administrator John Foster told Congress July 27 that he was increasingly concerned that the

pricey projects would force spending reductions for other key NNSA weapons programs, such as warhead surveillance and life extension.

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Nuke Pit Facility Just Make-Work Project

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ABQJOURNAL.COM
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Wednesday, August 18, 2010

Nuke Pit Facility Just Make-Work Project

By Peter Neils

President, Los Alamos Study Group

President Obama's long-term commitment to increase funding for the nuclear weapon's establishment to \$180 billion over the next nine years is irreconcilable with his stated commitment to nuclear disarmament. The apparent intention is to lock in a nuclear apartheid. The vast majority of the world, the non-nuclear countries, are apparently meant to kow-tow to the dictates of the nuclear weapons states while enduring disingenuous homilies about the dangers of nuclear proliferation that give lip service to disarmament. Meanwhile, major infrastructure investments, that can only be justified if new nuclear weapons designs are to be pursued, are in the works in America. International observers are not likely to overlook this incongruity.

What if, to name just one example, one were to suggest that 24,000 certified plutonium pits (currently stored securely at remote locations) were sufficient to ensure the surety of the U.S. nuclear stockpile while we actually led the transition to a nuclear weapons-free world, our obligation under international law?

An independent panel of acknowledged experts in the field has advised Congress that the existing inventory of pits will perform as designed at the least until the last decades of this century. Why, then, is Mr. Obama determined build a \$4.3 billion facility at Los Alamos National Laboratory designed to support the manufacture of yet more pits, our existing inventory of which will outlast the design life of this building twice over? He has placed himself in the awkward position of defending a construction project, the Chemical and Metallurgical Research Replacement Nuclear Facility, that was marketed to Congress as a \$350 million building that has grown to an estimated \$4.3 billion, with no firm cost basis yet completed. Few seem willing to call it what it has become, a boondoggle.

The Los Alamos Study Group has monitored and opposed this project from its inception in the 1999. We have now filed suit under the National Environmental Policy Act to stop all funding for and work on this building until a completely new Environmental Impact Statement is prepared. Following the announcement of our intent to sue, the National Nuclear Security Administration responded that it was conducting an internal review of the project, and it now appears to be on the verge of announcing that in light of significant changes to the project, it intends to conduct a Supplementary EIS. This is insufficient.

A Supplementary EIS does not require the NNSA to weigh the current project against all available alternatives. A Supplemental EIS is designed to assess the impacts of minor changes in a project. A project that now requires 347,000 cubic yards of concrete, 55 times the original, 27 times as much structural steel, entails as many as 100,000 heavy truck trips up and down Pajarito Road, and impacts significantly more surface area than the project that was presented in 2003 is not a modification of the original; it is not the same project.

We do not believe that this project would have been selected from the field of alternatives

evaluated in 2003 if it had carried its current cost and environmental consequences.

Americans are working harder than ever to pay their bills. Highly respected independent assessments commissioned by Congress have concluded with a high degree of confidence that the current stockpile will perform as designed far into the future. For a nearly autonomous government agency to throw our tax dollars away to enhance our capability to manufacture new weapons designs that cannot be certified is short-sighted. It is a make-work project for the laboratory that does not make sense, will damage non-proliferation efforts, and which America cannot afford.

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Nuke lawsuit part of bigger battle

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Los Alamos Monitor

August 19, 2010

Nuke lawsuit part of bigger battle

By Garrison Wells

The lawsuit filed by a grassroots citizen's group to stop construction of a plutonium trigger plant at Los Alamos National Laboratory is a minor portion of a multi-pronged effort, a spokesman for the group said Wednesday.

"The lawsuit is a small part of the story," said Darwin Bond-Graham, board member for The Los Alamos Study Group. "The biggest issue is what are the alternatives for the CMRR facility?"

Bond-Graham visited Los Alamos as part of Los Alamos Study Group's effort to get the word out about its drive to shut down the plant.

The group Tuesday filed a lawsuit in United States District Court in Albuquerque against the Department of Energy, DOE Secretary Stephen Chu, the National Nuclear Security Administration and Thomas Paul D'Agostino, NNSA administrator.

In the lawsuit, the group contends the nuclear plant is being built in violation of federal environmental regulations, which require that an environmental impact statement be completed prior to the construction.

"Defendants' decision to construct and operate the nuclear facility comprises a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment," the lawsuit states.

The DOE has maintained that an earlier environmental impact statement covers the \$4 billion project, tabbed the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement Nuclear Facility (CMRR), which has been delayed several times and morphed over the years.

Construction is expected to wrap up in 2020.

Bond-Graham said the group's efforts are also aimed at informing local residents of the impact that the lab will have during and after construction of the plutonium trigger plant.

"The NNSA has not informed people about the scale of this project, how big it has become," he said.

Among impacts local residents may feel will be traffic from the trucks for the project, dust, the need for temporary housing for the workers and disposal of volcanic ash and other waste.

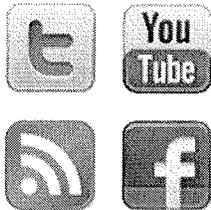
"We want to help government make better decisions," Bond-Graham said. "We intend to win the lawsuit."

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Los Alamos Watchdog Shoots an Arrow at the Beating Heart of Nuclear Weapons

By Russ Wellen, August 23, 2010

In a recent *Focal Points* post, we posed a fundamental question: Who stands at the front lines of disarmament? Is it the makers of the new movie *Countdown to Zero*? Disarmament groups like the Ploughshares Fund and the International Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Commission? Weapons-system-trashing activists a la the Berrigan brothers? Using the last as a reference point, we concluded that "even the perimeter fences of a submarine base aren't the front lines of disarmament. The honor goes to those groups that act as watchdogs on behalf of the public for U.S. national laboratories such as Los Alamos and Lawrence Livermore."

Greg Mello is the head of the primary watchdog for the former, the Los Alamos Study Group (LASG). As I wrote in my previous post, he explained that "\$3.4 billion of the proposed \$16 billion in new warhead spending [in the federal budget] is to be allotted to the construction of a Chemistry and Metallurgy Research facility for the construction of nuclear pits. In a *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* piece, he writes that, at 270,000-square-feet, the new facility 'would add only 22,500-square-feet of additional plutonium processing and lab space to [Los Alamos's] existing 59,600-square-feet of comparable space.' [That] works out to \$151,000 per square foot, or \$1,049 per square inch. Holy (watch your tax dollars go up in) smoke!"

Even worse, since "there is already a surfeit of backup pits [which] will last for many decades to come" the new facility "would increase production capacity to an even more absurd level." To provide perspective, as LASG notes elsewhere, "If built, it would be by far the most expensive government project ever built in New Mexico except the interstate highways."

To give you an idea of how LASG actually works, one of its staff, Darwin BondGraham, wrote in a press release, "Earlier this year we finally obtained enough information from [the Department of Energy] and its contractors to confidently determine that the increased cost, greatly expanded construction requirements, and . . . new environmental impacts . . . make the [Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement] different [from what] was originally analyzed." Thus: "On July 1 we formally notified the U.S. Department of Energy of our intent to seek a new Environmental Impact Statement, and to pursue an injunction against [the] Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement [facility]."

This is what life on the disarmament front lines looks like: poring over the books cheek by jowl with lawyers. And this, courtesy of an August 16 LASG

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press release, is what a frontal assault looks like.

The Los Alamos Study Group today filed a complaint in federal District Court in Albuquerque to halt further investment in [the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement facility]. . . . The complaint was filed against the Department of Energy . . . and the National Nuclear Security Administration [the NNSA, which, LASG alleges] have violated the National Environmental Protection Act . . . by preparing to construct [the facility] without an applicable Environmental Impact Statement. [Mello said] "NNSA changed the project to which it had committed without telling anyone, and without environmental analysis of alternatives either to the project."

Why an environmental impact statement? Department of Energy changes . . .

. . . helped drive the proposed facility underground -- into a thick stratum of loose volcanic ash which cannot support [the] new excavated depth of 125 feet (up from 50 feet) and replacement of an entire geologic stratum beneath the building with 225,000 cubic yards of concrete and grout. [This would also result in] greatly increased CO₂ emissions including more than 100,000 tons from concrete production alone [and] from 20,000 to 110,000 heavy truck [trips] just for concrete ingredients and disposal -- somewhere -- of loose volcanic ash.

To sum up, the Los Alamos Study Group is on the front lines of disarmament because it's confronting production of the nuclear pit, the beating heart of a nuclear weapon -- where the chain reaction occurs. As another such watchdog, Livermore's Tri-Valley CAREs, put it: "Stopping nuclear weapons where they start."

If you agree that LASG is (wo)manning the front lines of disarmament and you'd like to help, but are leery of NGOs top-heavy with administrative salaries, consider LASG. Donating to this self-contained, action-oriented organization figures to give you a lot of bang for the charitable buck. And make no mistake, bucks have got to bang if we hope to block the biggest modern-day bang of all -- the detonation of a nuclear bomb.

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"New START", the proposed CMRR Nuclear Facility and the LASG lawsuit against the DOE and NNSA

By willem malten

August 27, 2010

Tom Udall's recent [interview on Santa Fe's local public radio station KSFR](#) with Bill Dupuy, was very instructive as to how the New Mexico's democratic senator thinks about the recently filed suit by the Los Alamos Study Group versus the NNSA and DOE and what he furthermore said about the new CMRR-Nuclear Facility in Los Alamos is worth analyzing as well. While he says he is not trying to influence litigation he does note that litigation is expensive and cumbersome for all. In other words: *he doesn't really like it.*

Udall is still trying to figure out if official Washington would like to do another Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and has written a letter to that effect to Dr Chu.

Well...I can answer that for him: no, Washington has made no gestures suggesting a new EIS, especially if that EIS is to be written *before* committing to the facility, as legally it must be. Instead the Obama administration has been pushing for this monstrosity called CMRR-NF as hard as they can.

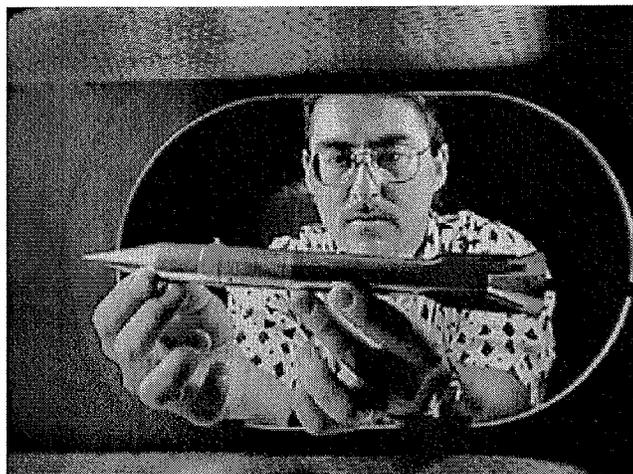
A new EIS? For a project that has already in the paperwork stage absorbed 290 or so million dollars? Let me tell you: they are not jumping for joy at the prospect of a lawsuit, because they know that if the NEPA rules are the law of the land, they'll *have* to have a new EIS. Why ?

A project that costs 10 times as much as was projected at the time an EIS was done (2003), is a different animal all together than before. Currently costs are projected around 4 billion and going up. Nobody is sure what the final price tag will be. The way it is designed now it will take as much as 55 times the concrete that was originally projected and its foundations will go about twice as deep (125 feet).

The latest design concept for the facility is interesting: CMRR-NF is to be a nuclear weapons "hotel" --that is: we don't really know what or who it will host and what it will produce over time.....*the flexibility of the building's purpose is seen as a plus.* "Grab the money, Build now, Deny everything, Think later" seems to be the motto. It is rapidly becoming another example of a mixture of Obama's misguided stimulus moneys for "Complex Revitalization", corporate cronyism (*after all LANL is now highly privatized and part and parcel of the Bechtel Corporation*), and an inexplicable worship of godfather Pete Dominici --all wrapped up together and poised to incarnate as a 4 billion dollar bunker on a earthquake fault-line "*on the hill*" in Los Alamos, New Mexico.

One can easily see the necessity of a new EIS by law. One can also easily see why the administration would like not to do one and has proceeded with its project, as if it makes no difference.....

What is the political motive behind something so irrational and pompous and out of touch with the crying needs of our time? We have seen a lot of "natural" man-made disasters in the last few years, Katrina, flooding, fires and drought, oil gushers, more fires, landslides, earthquakes, dead zones, etc. etc. and mostly, despite individual heroism, we have been helpless in the face of them. Yet somehow the "nation" is to find comfort in the idea that we can inflict such man-made disasters anywhere in the world at a moments notice by dropping a tennis ball sized nuclear warhead core designed and built at the new 4 billion dollar CMRR-NF building at LANL.



Udall says that the main rational for the CMRR-NF behemoth is to modernize the nuclear weapons production establishment which would be in accordance with the Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) published this year. Udall also clarifies the relationship between the signing of the START Treaty and the CMRR-NF. It takes 67 votes to pass a treaty. So that means that one has to cater to the republicans and neocons and cajole them to sign a substantially meaningless new START treaty with Russia. The new START arguably reduces the arsenal (though here opinions are quite mixed....*does this treaty really reduce the amounts of deployable warheads?*), but at the same time allows the parties to modernize their arsenals. Despite heaped up praise through the Obama propaganda machine, New START is a pretty insignificant step towards a nuclear free world. Less warheads but more destructive (and accurate, etc.). In so many ways a meaningless treaty, also since both sides shortly after the signing of the treaty, made their own conditions for possibly leaving the treaty at some future date of their own choosing.

So the latest rational for support from a senator like Udall is that a CMRR-Nuclear weapons Facility should be built, in order to gather votes for the New START *disarmament* treaty. *Are we living in an Orwellian world yet?*



Obviously we have a Faustian *quid pro quo* here...Udall thinks that he can get armament *and* disarmament, make peace with the peaceniks *and* build a new Nuclear Facility for new warheads.. As an existentialist I say: *that is not serious...*

It is correct for the Los Alamos Study Group to call for a new EIS. NEPA rules require the public and government agencies and native tribes alike to be apprised of LANL's vastly expanded plans for a CMRR- Nuclear Facility and its dramatic impact on the environment. Not having done so already is a violation and thanks to the LASG and their legal representation by Santa Fe attorney Thomas M. Hnasko this is coming to light. The public thus far has been largely kept in the dark about the tens of thousands cement trucks that will line the roads, or the disposal problems that come with 400.000 cubic yards of powdered volcanic ash, or the environmental impact of making three hundred and fifty thousand cubic yards of concrete. That last fact in itself --the production of that much concrete -- will emit over a 100.000 metric tons of CO2, which requires analysis of the project as a "Global Warming" source under the most recent guidelines. It is obvious that in so many ways the CMRR-Nuclear Facility is no longer a local issue.

With the lawsuit against the NNSA and DOE, holding the feet of Dr. Chu and Mr. Obama (and Mr. Udall) to the fire, the LASG clearly acts in the public's interests -- in the interest of "*good governance*". We hope this lawsuit will give pause to these plans so all parties can re-consider what is at stake here.

Our time is one of declining resources. The government is running out of money. Real challenges like global warming, poverty, unemployment, and hunger, are much more threatening than any of the imagined problems that the CMRR-NF is intended to solve. It is time to come to our senses and make real choices about our future.

You can make a good start by supporting this important lawsuit demanding a halt to the CMRR-NF, a new EIS and accountability of the DOE, LANL and the NNSA: contribute generously to the Los Alamos Study Group [here](#).

Disclaimer: Though all credit for following through on the LASG lawsuit goes to Greg Mello, head of the Los Alamos Study Group, I am proud to mention here that I also have been a long term director of the Study Group.

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U.S. National Nuclear Security Administration ♦ Russian Ministry of Atomic Energy
...plus International Nonproliferation Initiatives (State, DoD, G-8, IAEA) ♦ Uranium Enrichment

Volume 14 Nos. 34&35, Double Edition, August 30, 2010

LOS ALAMOS STUDY GROUP FILES SUIT OVER LANL PLUTONIUM FACILITY

The National Nuclear Security Administration has relied on inadequate environmental reviews of the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement project and the multibillion-dollar effort should be halted, according to a lawsuit filed in federal court in New Mexico earlier this month by the Los Alamos Study Group. The suit, filed Aug. 16, alleges that the 2003 Environmental Impact Statement performed on the project describes a facility that is significantly different than the one now proposed, and that material conditions have changed in a way that necessitates the additional discussion of alternatives—a requirement under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

The potential effects of the suit are unclear. In the past, successful NEPA litigation has forced new environmental reviews that have led to delays of a year or more on Department of Energy nuclear projects. Even unsuccessful lawsuits, like the case brought against DOE involving plans to build a new Kansas City Plant for the NNSA, have resulted in long delays. In the case involving the Kansas other environmental groups sued the NNSA to conduct a more stringent environmental review of the NNSA's move to a new facility, helping delay the start of construction by nearly two years.

'The Time for Cozy Internal Review Has Passed'

Los Alamos National Laboratory and National Nuclear Security Administration officials have previously responded to criticisms of their reliance on old NEPA studies by pointing to an ongoing review to determine whether additional NEPA analysis is needed. But Greg Mello, the Study Group's director, called the current effort inadequate. "The time for cozy internal review has [passed]," Study Group director Greg Mello said. "Everyone knows the project's costs, challenges, and impacts have exploded, and many parties, including NNSA and congressional committees, are starting to worry that the project has gotten too big, too expensive, and too risky."

NNSA's response to the lawsuit was limited to a written statement: "NNSA does not comment on pending litigation. The agency has initiated the process of preparing a supplement analysis for the proposed Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement Nuclear Facility. Pursuant to federal regulation, NNSA prepares a supplement analysis to determine whether an existing environmental impact statement should be supplemented, a new environmental impact statement should be prepared or no new NEPA documentation is required. NNSA takes its commitment to environmental stewardship and the state of New Mexico very seriously."

Mello's legal brief appears simultaneously targeted at technical legal questions surrounding NEPA, and also at some of the project's soft political underbelly, as concerns about rising federal deficits raise questions about the long term fiscal viability of the multi-billion dollar project. While the NNSA hasn't settled on a firm cost

estimate for the project and won't for several more years, budget documents indicate that the facility could cost more than \$4 billion to build. It is planned to replace Los Alamos' 1950s-era Chemistry and Metallurgy Research facility, relocating and consolidating analytical chemistry, material characterization and actinide research and development work at the lab in support of the agency's plutonium research and pit surveillance activities.

Suit Alleges Significant Increase in Facility's Size

On NEPA grounds, the Study Group and its attorneys argue that the 2003 review, which was later incorporated by reference in subsequent NNSA NEPA reviews of the lab and the broader nuclear complex, was "for a much simpler and less environmentally impactful nuclear facility concept." The suit notes that the size of the facility, which has been significantly modified in response to new data regarding seismic risk, has grown substantially since 2003: from a small aboveground facility to one that is mostly built underground and is 44 percent bigger than previously planned. "The underground behemoth NNSA now proposes to build bears little resemblance to the light, above-ground structure proposed in 2003," Mello said. "Any 'supplemental' analysis of the existing plan falls far short of what the law requires and what all parties—especially NNSA—badly need."

The suit also charges that the alternatives studies in 2003 are inadequate, in particular because of the facility's rising cost. "In the several years that have passed since defendants vetted project alternatives prior to the now-antiquated NEPA analysis, projected unit costs per useful square foot have risen even farther and faster than projected overall Nuclear Facility costs, thereby widening the potential range of reasonable alternatives to the proposed Nuclear Facility," the suit alleges.

Suit Targets Minor, Major Issues

Among the effects the Study Group alleges have not been properly analyzed are the seemingly mundane issues like the acreage needed for the project's construction yard and the tremendous volume of concrete planned for the project. And the suit also takes aim at some underlying problems with the project that appear to bear little connection to NEPA, but for which the lawsuit provides a tool for placing criticisms into the public record. For example, the lawsuit quotes LANL Director Michael Anastasio's July 15 Congressional testimony in which he expressed concerns about funding for the project given other competing future fiscal demands: "I fear that some may perceive that the FY11 budget request meets all of the necessary budget commitments for the program; however, there are still significant financial uncertainties, for example, the design of the UPF [the proposed Uranium Processing Facility in Tennessee] and CMRR are not complete and the final costs remain uncertain. As I look to the future, I remain concerned that science will be squeezed when trying to compete with capital infrastructure investments and life extension program funding priorities."

The Study Group also quotes former Lawrence Livermore Director Johnny Foster, who in July 20 Congressional testimony also raised questions about the coming financial squeeze related to CMRR, UPF and other needed weapons work: "At present we do not yet have good cost estimates for the new facilities, each of which are expected to cost billions of dollars. There is general concern that their costs will exceed the preliminary estimates and that may force major reductions in other NNSA nuclear weapons activities to include warhead surveillance, the life extensions and science programs."

—From staff reports

Print this article

LOS ALAMOS MONITOR

Waste staging project gets initial nod

9-3-10

By Carol A. Clark

The Department of Energy has approved the preliminary design of a new radioactive waste staging facility at Los Alamos National Laboratory.

The facility will replace several buildings and fabric domes at Technical Area 54, which must be closed and remediated by 2015 under the Consent Order agreement with the state of New Mexico.

"Technical Area 54 will close, but LANL's mission continues; this facility will be safer for workers and the public, it consolidates our operations and it will be more cost efficient," said Craig Leasure, deputy principal associate director of LANL's weapons program.

The transuranic (TRU) waste facility will be a staging area for newly generated waste, which by law must go to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant WIPP) near Carlsbad.

Since 1944, LANL has disposed of at least 17.5 million cubic feet of hazardous and radioactive wastes on-site at 24 officially designated material disposal areas, according to the Los Alamos Study Group, a nuclear watchdog group.

TRU waste is waste comprised of items such as gloves, clothing and lab equipment contaminated with elements heavier than uranium and above certain quantities.

"This facility is part of a coordinated set of construction projects anchored by the CMRR nuclear facility," LASG Executive Director Greg Mello said.

"There's no EIS (Environmental Impact Statement) for this set of activities including this new waste staging facility – and although the impacts of this facility were analyzed as part of LANL's site-wide environmental impact statement – the cumulative impacts of this project and several others in the Pajarito Corridor will be far greater than have been disclosed."

LANL's new four-acre waste staging complex is planned for a restricted area at TA-63 and will include multiple staging buildings, an operations center and a concrete pad for mobile waste characterization equipment, according to a LANL news release.

Workers will perform much the same verifications of TRU waste that now take place at TA-54, including high-energy neutron counting, which detects the amount of radioactivity within given containers.

TRU waste would be packaged where generated throughout various lab sites, then characterized and certified for shipping at the new facility, and finally loaded for shipping at the current TRU shipping facility.

The new facility will require modifying LANL's hazardous waste permit.

"We'll work closely with the New Mexico Environment Department to ensure we're meeting their expectations," Leasure said.

The project cost based on the conceptual design is an estimated \$85 million, with a projected range between \$71 million and \$124 million.

After preliminary and final designs are approved, the construction will occur in two phases including the site infrastructure and facility construction.

The project completion date is projected for December 2015.

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Sunday, September 05, 2010

LANL Proposal Needs New Study

By Willem Malten*Santa Fe*

Tom Udall's recent interview on Santa Fe's local public radio station, KSFR, with Bill Dupuy was very instructive as to how the New Mexico Democratic senator thinks about the recently filed suit by the Los Alamos Study Group versus the National Nuclear Safety Administration and Department of Energy, and what he furthermore said about the new CMRR nuclear facility in Los Alamos is worth analyzing as well. While he says he is not trying to influence litigation, he does note that litigation is expensive and cumbersome for all. In other words, he doesn't really like it. Udall is still trying to figure out if official Washington would like to do another Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) (for the facility) and has written a letter to that effect to Energy Secretary Steven Chu.

Well, I can answer that for him: no, Washington has made no gestures suggesting a new EIS, especially if that EIS is to be written before committing to the facility, as legally it must be. Instead the Obama administration has been pushing for this monstrosity called CMRR-NF as hard as they can.

A new EIS? For a project that has already in the paperwork stage absorbed \$290 million. Let me tell you: They are not jumping for joy at the prospect of a lawsuit, because they know that if the National Environmental Policy Act rules are the law of the land, they'll have to have a new EIS. Why?

A project that costs 10 times as much as was projected at the time an EIS was done, in 2003, is a different animal altogether than before. Currently, costs are projected around \$4 billion and going up. Nobody is sure what the final price tag will be. The way it is designed now, it will take as much as 55 times the concrete that was originally projected, and its foundations will go about twice as deep.

The latest design concept for the facility is interesting: CMRR-NF is to be a nuclear weapons "hotel"—that is, we don't really know what or who it will host and what it will produce over time. The flexibility of the building's purpose is seen as a plus — "grab the money, build now, deny everything, think later" seems to be the motto. It is rapidly becoming another example of a mixture of Obama's misguided stimulus money for "complex revitalization," corporate cronyism — after all, LANL is now highly privatized and part and parcel of the Bechtel Corp. — and an inexplicable worship of godfather (former Sen.) Pete Domenici — all wrapped up together and poised to incarnate as a \$4 billion bunker on a earthquake fault-line.

One can easily see the necessity of a new EIS by law. One can also easily see why the administration would like not to do one and has proceeded with its project as if it makes no difference.

What is the political motive behind something so irrational and pompous and out of touch with the crying needs of our time? We have seen a lot of "natural" man-made disasters in the last few years — Katrina, flooding, fires and drought, oil gushers, more fires, landslides, earthquakes, dead zones — and mostly, despite individual heroism, we have been helpless in the face of them. Yet somehow the nation is to find comfort in the idea that we can inflict such man-made disasters anywhere in the world at a moments notice by dropping a tennis ball-sized nuclear warhead core designed and built at the new \$4 billion CMRR-NF building

at LANL.

Udall says that the main rationale for the CMRR-NF behemoth is to modernize the nuclear weapons production establishment which would be in accordance with the Nuclear Posture Review published this year. Udall also clarifies the relationship between the signing of the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) and the CMRR-NF. It takes 67 votes to pass a treaty. So that means that one has to cater to the Republicans and neo-cons and cajole them to sign a substantially meaningless new START treaty with Russia. The new START arguably reduces the arsenal — though here opinions are quite mixed; does this treaty really reduce the amounts of deployable warheads? — but at the same time allows the parties to modernize their arsenals. Despite heaped-up praise through the Obama propaganda machine, the new START is a pretty insignificant step towards a nuclear-free world. Fewer warheads but more destructive and accurate (weapons). In so many ways a meaningless treaty, also since both sides shortly after the signing of the treaty, listed their own conditions for possibly leaving the treaty at some future date of their own choosing.

So the latest rationale for support from a senator like Udall is that a CMRR nuclear weapons facility should be built, in order to gather votes for the new START disarmament treaty. Are we living in an Orwellian world yet?

Obviously we have a Faustian quid pro quo here. Udall thinks that he can get armament and disarmament, make peace with the peaceniks and build a new nuclear facility for new warheads. As an existentialist, I say that is not serious.

It is correct for the Los Alamos Study Group to call for a new EIS. NEPA rules require the public and government agencies and native tribes alike to be apprised of LANL's vastly expanded plans for a CMRR- Nuclear Facility and its dramatic impact on the environment.

Not having done so already is a violation, and, thanks to the study group and their legal representation by Santa Fe attorney Thomas M. Hnasko, this is coming to light. The public thus far has been largely kept in the dark about the tens of thousands cement trucks that will line the roads, or the disposal problems that come with 400,000 cubic yards of powdered volcanic ash, or the environmental impact of making 350,000 cubic yards of concrete. That last fact in itself — the production of that much concrete — will emit over a 100,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide, which requires analysis of the project as a global warming source under the most recent guidelines. It is obvious that in so many ways the CMRR-Nuclear Facility is no longer a local issue.

With the lawsuit against the NNSA and DOE, holding the feet of Secretary Chu and President Obama — and Mr. Udall — to the fire, the LASG clearly acts in the public's interests and in the interest of good governance. We hope this lawsuit will give pause to these plans so all parties can re-consider what is at stake here.

Our time is one of declining resources. The government is running out of money. Real challenges like global warming, poverty, unemployment and hunger are much more threatening than any of the imagined problems that the CMRR-NF is intended to solve. It is time to come to our senses and make real choices about our future.

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New START's Big Winners: U.S. Nuke Complex, Pentagon, and Contractors

By Darwin BondGraham, September 17, 2010



Passage of New START in a 14-4 vote out of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee is already being hailed by Democrats and arms control NGOs as a substantial victory. A floor vote for ratification is now apparently set to occur after the elections.

While ratification is by no means guaranteed, there are several clear winners already: Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman, Aerojet General, Alliant Techsystems, Los Alamos and Lawrence Livermore nuclear weapons laboratories, Y-12 nuclear labs, the Pentagon, and Bechtel Corporation.

While much noise has been made about the New START treaty's cut to the nuclear weapons stockpile, the actual required reduction in arms may be as low as 8%, or 162 warheads out of a total of thousands. Furthermore, keep in mind too that this only affects deployed strategic warheads, not "tactical" weapons, and not weapons in the "reserve" stockpile.

So why the big deal? Why are both sides fighting like mad over a treaty that really requires virtually no change to the status quo US-Russia relationship and US nuclear stockpile?

Here's why in a nutshell:

1. The Democrats, led by the Obama administration, want the treaty badly in order to prove that their means of combating proliferation and the rising power of states like Iran is better than the Republican strategy. The difference essentially is that the Democrats propose to give the *impression* that the USA is cutting its arsenal and seeking "global zero." Of course it's not and the Dems intend to fund the US nuclear complex at

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large levels. Long-range national security state doctrine calls for keeping nukes far into the future, and modernizing them the whole way along. But the Democratic foreign policy establishment thinks their plan will provide superior power, diplomatic and military, when dealing with nations that pose a threat to US imperial interests. It's a tough balancing act, this anti-nuclear nuclearism! Thankfully the liberal militarists have found willing allies in the foundation community. Funds and NGOs like Ploughshares, American Friends Service Committee, and Peace Action West have lobbied extensively for ratification, proving that a little money goes a long way in politics.

2. The Republican strategy remains what the old gipper gave us -- "peace through strength." G. W. Bush pursued it with his aggressive nuclear weapons programs, but the Democrats managed to back him down. Undeterred, many Republicans think the Democrats are wasting the national security state's time and energy and would just rather invest huge sums in weapons and invade and occupy nations as a first and early recourse when problems arise. There remains a great deal of ideological opposition to treaties, especially arms control pacts, whether or not they actually constrain US military might.

3. In addition to this acrimonious debate about imperial strategy, there's bread and butter. While New START doesn't pose any threats to any military funding whatsoever, it does offer a major opportunity to demand huge funding increases for several weapons programs.

A. Chief among these is the nuclear weapons program. New START ratification is being used as the primary forum in which to hash out the budget for nuclear weapons over the next ten years. Thus far supporters of the nuke complex have gotten a pretty good deal; a minimum \$10 billion increase over the next ten years to build a new plutonium pit factory, new uranium plant, new weapons components factory, and other major capital projects. Corker and Isakson's votes on September 16 to pass the treaty to the full Senate for a ratification vote may signal that they have received even larger funding commitments for the huge nuclear facilities in their states, or that they will use their vote on the floor to extort better deals between now and then.

B. Then there's "missile defense" and "prompt global strike." Missile defense has its own agency in the Pentagon and budget larger than the NNSA's. Prompt global strike, a new conventional strategic weapons system capable of killing anyone on the planet in under an hour with hypersonic munitions, is a multi-hundred million dollar and growing program. Both are getting very large increases in Obama's FY2011 budget, due in part to Republican demands that neither program be constrained by New START. Of course the treaty does no such thing, but the concern is really a theatrical way of demanding even larger increases for these weapons systems. The Democrats are too happy to oblige. Obama and Biden are champions of prompt global strike.

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4. Thus the Senators on both sides of the debate are working for the nuclear weapons complex, Pentagon, and their powerful corporate contractors. The Democrats have already offered up major funding increases, even before Republican opposition. Conservatives have only pulled the issue further to the right, and arms control foundations and NGOs have fed the whole process by making New START out to be vastly more important and meaningful than it objectively is.

Still don't see the bi-partisan consensus to fund the nuclear weapons complex and Pentagon's missile defense and prompt global strike programs and contractors? Here's some campaign finance data for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee members' 2010 election cycle bank accounts. Both Democrats and Republicans are well endowed, demonstrating why the interests of the nuclear weapons complex and other weapons programs are absolutely not threatened by New START.

[The first number ranks the contributing corporation among the Senator's top donors for 2010. Figures from <http://www.opensecrets.org>. Raytheon, Textron, Lockheed, Boeing, United Technologies, General Dynamics, Northrop Grumman, SAIC, Carlyle, BAE, and EADS all contract with the Missile Defense Agency and related Pentagon program offices. Lockheed serves at the lead contractor for prompt global strike. Bechtel, Honeywell, CH2M Hill, McDermott (through its BWXT subsidiary), URS, Fluor, and Lockheed Martin contract with the NNSA to operate the US nuclear weapons complex. AECOM is subcontractor for the US nuclear weapons program.]

Democrats

John Kerry

20 Raytheon Co \$15,250
84 Honeywell International \$8,500
84 Textron Inc \$8,500

Christopher J. Dodd

3 United Technologies \$115,250
16 General Dynamics \$29,300

Barbara Boxer

18 CH2M HILL \$23,500
84 Lockheed Martin \$10,300
89 Honeywell International \$10,000

Robert Menendez

21 CH2M Hill \$36,075
95 AECOM Technology Corp \$17,200

Benjamin L. Cardin

41 Northrop Grumman \$15,700
83 Lockheed Martin \$11,000

Robert P. Casey Jr

5 SAIC Inc \$20,000

8 Northrop Grumman \$18,150
21 US Dept of Defense \$10,800
24 McDermott International \$10,000
48 Raytheon Co \$8,250

Jeanne Shaheen

17 Honeywell International \$16,000

Kirsten E. Gillibrand

59 BAE Systems \$16,300
79 Carlyle Group \$12,500
85 Raytheon Co \$11,750

Republicans**Richard Lugar**

24 Lockheed Martin \$10,000
33 Raytheon Co \$9,750
36 Bechtel Group \$8,850
39 Honeywell International \$8,500

Bob Corker

57 Honeywell International \$15,000
85 US Government [partly Y-12] \$12,650

Johnny Isakson

50 Boeing Co \$10,000
50 Lockheed Martin \$10,000

James E. Risch

5 URS Corp \$12,700
12 Honeywell International \$10,000
50 Bechtel Group \$7,000
69 Boeing Co \$5,000

Jim DeMint

13 URS Corp/Washington \$16,499
18 Fluor Corp \$14,250
25 Lockheed Martin \$12,600
44 Boeing Co \$10,201
91 Honeywell International \$9,000

John Barrasso

15 Northrop Grumman \$13,500
34 Honeywell International \$10,000
96 URS Corp \$6,000

Roger F. Wicker

14 Northrop Grumman \$17,500
21 European Aeronautic Defence & Space \$14,500

41 General Dynamics \$11,000

47 Raytheon Co \$10,000

James M. Inhofe

21 BAE Systems \$12,700

27 Lockheed Martin \$12,000

29 Boeing Co \$11,750

48 Honeywell International \$10,000

48 Northrop Grumman \$10,000

48 Raytheon Co \$10,000

48 United Technologies \$10,000

Darwin BondGraham is a member of the Los Alamos Study Group. He's also an ethnographer and historian with a degree in sociology. His current work focuses on economic and social development.

Tagged as nuclear weapons, Disarmament,
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Lab, watchdog group spar over nuclear facility

Feds urge dismissal of environment suit

By Roger Snodgrass | For The New Mexican

9/22/2010

Los Alamos National Laboratory is seeking dismissal of an environmental lawsuit, saying it can neutralize legal objections with plans to supplement a 7-year-old environmental analysis of the lab's controversial new nuclear facility.

The subject of the complaint is the lab's Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement facility and, more specifically, a \$4 billion structure for handling and storing plutonium.

After eight years of effort, the building is still in the design phase and now embroiled in litigation. The Los Alamos Study Group, a nuclear watchdog based in Albuquerque, claims the building has outgrown its environmental footprint.

In a letter dated Sept. 17, an attorney for the U.S. Department of Justice has asked the Los Alamos Study Group to withdraw its legal complaint. The letter says the lab is still working on its requirements under the National Environmental Policy Act, and therefore the environmental justification is not subject to legal action.

"Your client's case is not ripe for judicial review," wrote trial attorney John Tustin in a letter on behalf of the U.S. Department of Energy and the National Nuclear Security Administration.

Greg Mello, executive director of the Los Alamos Study Group, said the request amounts to an admission that the project needs additional analysis under the National Environmental Policy Act, but the group disagrees with the remedy.

"They do seem to have a disconnect between the legal world of compliance and the actual world of the project," Mello said Wednesday. "They seem to think that they can put a paperwork patch on the tail of their noncompliance, but just keep going."

Thomas N. Hnasko, attorney for the study group, responded to Tustin in a letter today, reiterating the main point of the complaint, that the nuclear facility now in process bears virtually no relationship to the project analyzed under a 2003 environmental impact statement.

"Changed circumstances, significant new knowledge, changed national policies, dramatic increases in expected environmental impacts and a ten-fold increase in expected cost compel environmental and

business-case analyses of new, reasonable and less environmentally-destructive primary alternatives to the current action," Hnasko wrote.

Tustin's letter said if the group declined his request, he would ask the court to dismiss the case.

The Los Alamos Study Group filed its case Aug. 16 in U.S. District Court.

An appropriation bill waits for Congress to authorize \$166 million in funding for the project in the next fiscal year beginning Oct. 1. Most observers believe the measure is unlikely to pass before the November elections and that Congress will resort to a continuing resolution to fund the government in the interim.

Tustin was unavailable for comment Wednesday.

Contact Roger Snodgrass at roger.sno@gmail.com.



LOS ALAMOS STUDY GROUP



In light of lawsuit LANL planning new study

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Thursday, September 23, 2010

New Study of LANL Project Planned in Light of Lawsuit

By John Fleck
Journal Staff Writer

Federal officials say they plan to do a new study of the environmental effects of a proposed multibillion dollar Los Alamos plutonium lab.

But a group that filed a lawsuit over the project said the new study does not go far enough, and work should be halted while an environmental review is completed.

A Justice Department attorney notified the Los Alamos Study Group in a Sept. 17 letter that it plans a new environmental study of the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement Nuclear Facility.

The Study Group filed suit in August, saying the studies on which the project was based, completed in 2004, do not adequately address the changed nature of the project. Estimated costs have increased since 2004, while the need for the nuclear weapons work to be done in the lab has changed with changes in U.S. nuclear weapons policy, the Study Group alleges in its lawsuit.

The project would replace the lab's 55-year-old Chemistry and Metallurgy Research building, which federal safety auditors recently reported was "seismically fragile and poses a continuing risk to workers and the public."

Federal nuclear program managers have been trying to replace CMR for two decades, but the projects have been repeatedly delayed because of rising costs and other problems. The most recent cost estimate for the project was \$4 billion.

In the Sept. 17 letter, Justice Department attorney John Tustin said the National Nuclear Security Administration has decided to complete a new "Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement" on the project.

Tustin asked the Study Group to drop its lawsuit because of the new study, but in a letter Wednesday, the organization's attorney declined.

A "supplemental" study is too limited to deal with a project that "has transmuted into an endeavor entirely different from that which was proposed and examined" when the project was first studied in the early 2000s, wrote Thomas Hnasko, the group's attorney.

Hnasko also argued the federal government needs to stop work while a new environmental study is done. Design work is currently under way, and the NNSA has asked Congress for \$225 million for design work and site preparations for the project.

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Volume 14 No. 39

September 27, 2010

NNSA PLANS NEW CMRR ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS, BUT GROUP WON'T DROP SUIT

The National Nuclear Security Administration has concluded it needs to perform a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) on its new Los Alamos plutonium lab. But the group suing the agency over lack of environmental review on the project says the decision does not go far enough and is planning on seeking an injunction to stop work on the new facility.

The NNSA's decision to go ahead with the SEIS on the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement-Nuclear Facility (CMRR-NF) was revealed in a Sept. 17 letter from Justice Department attorney John Tustin to the Los Alamos Study Group. The study group filed suit in August, alleging that a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review of the project released in 2004 is no longer adequate to support federal decision-making on the project because of recent changes, both in the project itself and the programmatic need for its construction. "We want the EIS to examine primary alternatives to the project, not just tweaks," Los Alamos Study Group Director Greg Mello told *NW&M Monitor*. "We want the NNSA to look hard at whether it needs to build a CMRR at all. And if so, in what way? We don't think we'll get that from a supplemental EIS."

'There's Far Too Much Momentum in this Project'

In a Sept. 22 response, Study Group attorney Thomas Hnasko countered that the decision to do a supplemental EIS does not go far enough, and that rather a full-blown Environmental Impact Statement is needed. Hnasko also reiterated the lawsuit's contention that work on the CMRR must be stopped while the environmental review is completed. "There's far too much momentum in this project," Mello said. "Formally, because they're investing in the project illegally, and practically because the more they invest in this one alternative the deeper the Department is committed to it."

The CMRR project lies at the heart of nuclear weapons complex modernization efforts, which have become a key point of discussion in the political debate about a new arms control treaty with the Russians. In efforts to win Republican support for that treaty, a top Obama Administration priority, officials have pledged money to move forward with CMRR and other weapons complex modernization programs. The project faces problems, however, because of its rising costs. A review of the project design is currently underway to determine a firm cost estimate, but as a placeholder, the Administration's Fiscal Year 2011 budget request pegged the cost in excess of \$4 billion. The rising cost, and skepticism because of the NNSA's track record of missed deadlines and cost overruns, has been a major problem shadowing the project. The Study Group is targeting those concerns with its contention that a NEPA analysis must include discussion of alternatives to building the CMRR, such as upgrades to existing facilities.

Feds Try to Dissuade Lawsuit

Tustin's letter reveals some of the back-and-forth that went on prior to the Study Group filing its lawsuit, as federal officials tried to persuade the group that a lawsuit was not timely because a "draft supplemental analysis" was currently underway to determine what sort of NEPA coverage the project needed. According to Tustin, that argument was laid out in a July 30 letter to the study Group, two weeks before the group filed its lawsuit. In his letter, Tustin reported that the NNSA, based on that "draft supplemental analysis," is now preparing a formal Notice of Intent for the new study. Because the NEPA analysis is currently underway, Tustin argued that the issue is "not ripe for judicial review," and asked the Study Group to withdraw its lawsuit.

Hnasko countered that an SEIS, which would build on the 2004 analysis rather than starting from scratch, would be inadequate, and that NEPA requires a full analysis be done. But in the meantime, Hnasko argued that the decision to do an SEIS amounts to a tacit admission that NEPA coverage for the project is inadequate, and that therefore the work now underway on the project, including both design work and site preparation, should be halted.

—*Todd Jacobson and staff reports*

Feds reopen study on LANL facility

By Roger Snodgrass | The New Mexican

10/1/2010

The nation's nuclear weapons agency announced Friday a plan to supplement the current environmental study for the nuclear facility part of Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement Facility at Los Alamos National Laboratory.

In a notice published in the *Federal Register*, the National Nuclear Security Administration said that a supplemental environmental impact statement may be called for when there are substantial changes, new circumstances or new information relevant to environmental concerns.

As a rationale for reopening the environmental file, NNSA specifically referenced a series of "geotechnical investigations," which resulted in a much higher set of seismic risks and a correspondingly more extensive and expensive construction process, including a concrete foundation 125 feet deep.

An earlier environmental study analyzed alternatives based on two different locations for the CMRR and two different scenarios for a "hybrid" version with the radiological lab in one place and the nuclear facility in another.

In view of the rapid escalation of the budget, which has grown from \$600 million six years ago to the latest estimates of more than \$5 billion, critics have questioned many discrepancies between the earlier document and existing plans.

The new study will consider three alternatives, along with a baseline based on no action, which would authorize the activity already covered under an EIS in 2003.

The agency's preferred course, described in the notice, is to take the new seismic information, new safety assurances, new sustainable design principles and environmental conservation measures into account, along with the infrastructure and materials to realize those changes in the plans for the new facility. Those considerations would be added to the project currently under way.

One alternative to be examined would be to stop the current plans and use the aging Chemistry and Metallurgy Research building, which the CMRR is partly meant to replace, but "with no facility upgrades, while performing routine maintenance at the level needed to sustain programmatic operations for as long as feasible."

The other alternative would be to continue on in the current CMRR but to make the necessary upgrades to continue working there for another 20-30 years.

In posting the notice, NNSA sent out a news release emphasizing the prominence given to the project in the Nuclear Weapons Posture Review and in the president's 2011 budget. The Department of Energy's budget has not been approved by Congress so far this year, but at the administration's request an extra \$624 million was approved for the nuclear weapons program on an "emergency" basis in a continuing resolution passed by Congress and signed by President Obama on Friday.

On an accelerated schedule, the NNSA will hold two scoping sessions in the area, one in White Rock on Oct. 19 and one in Pojoaque on Oct. 20. Members of the public will have 30 days to comment on the various alternatives.

Responding to the announcement, Greg Mello, executive director of the Los Alamos Study Group, called attention to his group's lawsuit in federal district court that maintains the agencies are barred from proceeding with major federal projects without an adequate environmental analysis.

"While we are pleased that NNSA now admits the environmental analysis underpinning its choice to construct the Nuclear Facility is inadequate, today's announcement goes nowhere near far enough," he said.

Also on Friday, Jay Coghlan, Nuclear Watch director, called for a fourth alternative — "stop operations at the dangerous (CMRR) Building and do not build the Nuclear Facility," he said in an announcement.

A semi-annual informational meeting on the CMRR will be hosted by Los Alamos National Laboratory from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. Thursday at the Hilltop House in Los Alamos.

Contact Roger Snodgrass at roger.sno@gmail.com.



LOS ALAMOS STUDY GROUP

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Nuclear funding gets boost

Alamogordo Daily News

By Tim Korte, Associated Press Writer

Posted: 10/02/2010 12:00:00 AM MDT

ALBUQUERQUE - The budget for United States nuclear weapons programs received a 10 percent increase over funding levels for the 2010 budget year, a boost hailed by Sen. Jeff Bingaman but assailed by the leader of an anti-nuclear group.

Congressional Democrats and Republicans agreed this week, in a continuing budget resolution that funds government for the next two months, to support a \$624 million increase for weapons work by the National Nuclear Security Administration.

The nuclear funding bill needs final approval by Congress, which left Washington this week without approving a federal budget, but its inclusion in the continuing resolution was significant because it reflected increased weapons funding sought for 2011 by the Obama administration.

The emergency appropriation expires Dec. 3.

"This bill is very good for Sandia and Los Alamos national labs because it strongly supports the key stockpile stewardship work they do," Bingaman said in a news release. "It is a sign of how important the labs are and will remain to our national security."

Bingaman said almost all other federal agencies received continued funding at 2010 levels. He said the additional NNSA funding would "lend strong support" to stockpile stewardship programs at the New Mexico labs ahead of debate on a proposed START treaty with Russia.

The Obama administration still hopes to get the Senate to consider the Russian arms control deal before a new Congress takes office in January.

The director of the watchdog Los Alamos Study Group, Greg Mello, questioned why Congress and the administration would prioritize the nuclear program over other issues. He criticized the administration for pursuing nuclear funding to obtain a political objective ratification of the treaty.

"These are not the priorities that would put people to work, provide health care or education, protect the environment, or halt what most ordinary people understand to be a continuing economic decline, with no end in sight," Mello said.

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Lawmakers Back Nuclear Weapons Budget Boost

Oct. 4, 2010

A continuing budget resolution to keep the U.S. government operating through early December provides a \$624 million boost in nuclear weapons funding for the new budget year beyond the amount appropriated in fiscal 2010, the Associated Press reported Friday (see GSN, July 22; Tim Korte, Associated Press/Alamogordo Daily News, Oct. 1).

President Obama last week signed the resolution to fund federal activities for the first two months of fiscal 2011, which began Friday, Federal News Radio reported. The resolution continues only through Dec. 3 (Jolie Lee, Federal News Radio, Oct. 3).

The funding boost for the National Nuclear Security Administration represented a victory for the Obama administration, which sought the money as part of a planned elevation in nuclear weapons spending over five years, according to AP (see GSN, Feb. 19; Korte, Associated Press).

The resolution enables a significant boost in spending for work on the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement building at the Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico, the Albuquerque Journal reported Friday (see GSN, Aug. 17). The facility was projected to cost \$4 billion, but its final expense was still uncertain (John Fleck, Albuquerque Journal, Oct. 1).

"This bill is very good for Sandia and Los Alamos national labs because it strongly supports the key stockpile stewardship work they do," Senator Jeff Bingaman (D-N.M.) said in a press release. "It is a sign of how important the labs are and will remain to our national security," AP quoted him as saying.

Most other branches of the federal government received the same level of funding under the short-term bill as they had in the previous budget cycle, Bingaman said. He added that the NNSA spending increase would "lend strong support" to maintenance of the U.S. nuclear arsenal as lawmakers prepare to consider ratification of a new nuclear arms control treaty with Russia (see GSN, Sept. 29; Korte, Associated Press).

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton linked the spending increase to an administration bid to win ratification of the pact, the Journal reported. "I look forward to the vote in the lame duck session that will once again

demonstrate the Senate joining all of its predecessors in years past to continue to support arms control [treaties]," she said (Fleck, *Albuquerque Journal*).

One independent watchdog said the funds could be better spent elsewhere, AP reported.

"These are not the priorities that would put people to work, provide health care or education, protect the environment, or halt what most ordinary people understand to be a continuing economic decline, with no end in sight," Los Alamos Study Group Director Greg Mello said (Korte, Associated Press).

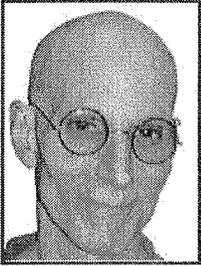
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How Does Staying Mum on Israel's Nukes Help the Peace Process?



October 5, 2010 Russ Wellen

It's bad enough that Israel, along with North Korea, Pakistan, and India, maintains an unacknowledged nuclear arsenal outside the Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). But, unlike the other three, which are all too happy to trumpet their possession of nukes to their neighbors and world, Israel continues to keep up the farcical, not to mention insulting, pretense that it's nuke-free. Worse, the United States enables it in the ultimate game of don't ask, don't tell.

Obviously that doesn't sit well with Arab states, not to mention Iran. At the 2010 General Conference of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) two weeks ago, they once again called for Israel to join the NPT. But their resolution, even though it was nonbinding, was rejected by the other members states of the IAE. Reuters reported:

Washington had urged countries to vote down the symbolically important although non-binding resolution, saying it could derail broader efforts to ban nuclear warheads in the Middle East and also damage fresh Israeli-Palestinian peace talks.

"The winner here is the peace process, the winner here is the opportunity to move forward with a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East," said Glyn Davies, the U.S. ambassador to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

But as Steve Hynd at Newshoggers writes:

That Israel seems able to entirely dictate the agenda, with the US bending over to accommodate its demands that it hang onto both its nuclear arsenal and the almost non-existent veil of "ambiguity" draped over it, does not seem to me to bode well for Middle-Eastern peace or for regional disarmament.

To expand on that, Washington seems to think that helping Israel keep up non-nuclear appearances might make Israel less inclined to once again undermine the Israel-Palestine peace process. Especially since, as the World Bank pronounced last week: "If the Palestinian Authority maintains its current performance in institution-building and delivery of public services, it is well-positioned for the establishment of a state at any point in the near future."

To even suggest that facilitating Israel's silence about its nuclear weapons program paves the way for both peace in the Middle East and making it a nuclear-free weapons zone is yet another slap in the face to the Arab states and Iran. The latter, especially, can scarcely be expected to to

surrender to the the view that its obstructionism, however maddening, around a program that nowhere close to weaponized, is an exponentially — not to mention “existentially” — greater threat than a state that has had nukes for years and refuses to admit as much.

The other discordant nuclear note of the week arrives courtesy of Greg Mello in a Los Alamos Study Group mailing. On September 14, the 23 Republicans on the [House Appropriations Committee](#) issued a [press release](#) that stated: “Due to the failure of the Democrat [sic] Congress to enact a single Appropriations bill so far this year to provide funding for Federal Government programs and agencies, a CR [Continuing Resolution] will be necessary to continue government operations past the end of the fiscal year, which expires on September 30th.” They insist that the CR “be ‘clean’ and free of any extraneous spending or policy provisions” and focused instead on “continuing the activities of government at the absolute minimum level necessary until we finish our work on the fiscal year 2011 spending bills.”

Amazingly, the “extraneous spending” to which they seek to put a stop for now includes not only typical Democratic measures like a “\$1.9 billion increase for new Race to the Top grants, \$250 million increase for new and expanded programs to implement the health care bill,” but a “\$624 million increase for programs related to the unratified START Treaty.”

If the Republicans are cutting off their nose to spite their face, their owed grudging credit for sticking to their big government principles. Wait: isn't it more likely that they're intent on hitting the Obama administration up for an even larger increase in nuclear-weapons spending next year?

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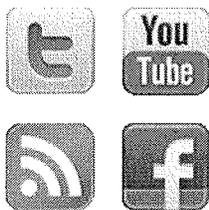
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It's Not Nuclear Weapons That Need "Modernization," But New START

By Russ Weilen, October 8, 2010

I'm aware that I'm committing arms-control heresy. But the new START treaty that Presidents Obama and Medvedev signed looks like more trouble than it's worth. To begin with, as Ivan Oelrich and Hans Kristensen reported for the Federation of American Scientists back in June . . .

. . . while the treaty reduces the *legal limit* for deployed strategic warheads, it doesn't actually reduce the *number* of warheads. A peculiar counting rule increases the importance of bombers: each bomber counts only as one nuclear bomb although the B-52 can carry 20 nuclear-armed cruise missiles. [Also] the treaty does not require destruction of a single nuclear warhead and actually permits the United States and Russia to deploy almost the same number of strategic warheads that were permitted by the 2002 Moscow Treaty.

Worse, to secure the eight Republican votes needed for ratification by the United States Senate (and in the interest of pork husbandry in general), the Obama administration is requesting \$7 billion, a 10 percent increase, in funding for nuclear weapons "modernization" (as the defense world calls it) and stewardship. Typical of Republicans seeking funds for the nuclear-weapons industry is Republican Senator Lamar Alexander of Tennessee. Speaking of work inside Y-12, the facility in his state, as it exists now, he said, "It's like building a Corvette in a Model-T factory."

As if that's not bad enough, as Greg Mello of the Los Alamos Study Group makes clear in a press release, on September 30, "Congress completed action on a Continuing Resolution (CR) to fund the federal government in the new fiscal year (FY), which begins today. The President signed the bill."

What's a continuing resolution? Here's what it means in this instance (apologies for lack of link; can't recall where I found this).

Due to the failure of the Democrat [sure sign it's from a conservative site! -- RW] Congress to enact a single Appropriations bill so far this year to provide funding for Federal Government programs and agencies, a CR will be necessary to continue government operations past the end of the fiscal year, which expire[d] on September 30th. These emergency appropriations last until December 3, by which time Congress must either pass appropriations bills or another CR.

Mello again: "This CR continues funding for federal agencies at the same level as [fiscal year] 2010, with very few exceptions." Among them were some which,

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even though a CR is intended as essentially a holding pattern, actually received more money. "One of those rare exceptions was an emergency increase in nuclear weapons spending in the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA)." He continues (emphasis added):

According to historical data in [the Los Alamos] Study Group files, today's increase [in the case of Los Alamos in New Mexico] is the largest annual increase, in both absolute and percentage terms, since the Manhattan Project. Annual nuclear weapons appropriations in New Mexico [just] increased by about \$527 million . . . 84% of the \$625 million net overall increase at all the [NNSA] sites.

But an emergency? Again, it's to secure Republican vote for ratification by the Senate which, Mello explains, "the Administration hopes to accomplish prior to seating a new Congress, widely expected to contain fewer members of the President's party." But . . .

To pick this particular emergency priority over nearly all other objectives of government at this time speaks volumes about the priorities of Congress and this Administration. These are not the priorities that would put people to work, provide health care or education, protect the environment, or halt what most ordinary people understand to be a continuing economic decline, with no end in sight.

This is cynicism to the third power: First, calling it an emergency. Second, trading funding to the nuclear-weapons industry for START votes. Third and even worse, turning START into a front -- or more to the point, an engine -- for securing said funding.

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Volume 14 No. 43

October 25, 2010

SECRETARY OF ENERGY INITIATES ADDITIONAL REVIEW OF UPF, CMRR - NF

Six-Week Study to Take Hard Look at Requirements for Multi-Billion-Dollar Facilities

Coming on the heels of reviews by Department of Energy and Pentagon cost analysis specialists, Energy Secretary Steven Chu is in the process of initiating his own independent study on the National Nuclear Security Administration's two biggest construction projects, the agency said last week. The independent review of the requirements for the Uranium Processing Facility planned for the Y-12 National Security Complex and the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement-Nuclear Facility that is to be built at Los Alamos National Laboratory is set to kick off Nov. 22 and last six weeks, examining the requirements for the facilities as senior DOE officials try to zero in on accurate cost ranges for the projects in advance of the Administration's Fiscal Year 2012 budget request. "NNSA and DOE leadership is using best available information from the contractors and independent review teams to update estimated cost range estimates for both projects, which will be publicly available when the President submits his FY12 budget request to Congress in early February," NNSA spokeswoman Jennifer Wagner told *NW&M Monitor*.

NW&M Monitor has learned that at least seven respected experts in the nuclear weapons field are slated to participate in the study, including former DOE/NNSA officials and current consultants Earl Whiteman and Steve Guidice, former Under Secretary of Energy and MIT professor Ernest Moniz, former Los Alamos National Laboratory Director Siegfried Hecker, nuclear weapons expert Dick Garwin, UC Berkeley professor Raymond Jeanloz, and University of Texas-Austin professor and JASON Defense Advisory Group chair Roy Schwitters.

There has been no shortage of reviews of the projects in recent years, a testament both to their complexity and importance to efforts to modernize the nation's nuclear weapons complex. UPF will replace aging facilities at Y-12—primarily the 9212 production complex—while CMRR-NF would shift LANL's analytical chemistry, material characterization and actinide research and development work at the lab in support of the agency's plutonium research and pit surveillance activities out of the 1940s-era Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Facility. The Chu-directed study is expected to complement other completed and ongoing reviews of the projects and take a hard look at whether or not current plans match the capabilities that are needed for the facilities, which has a direct impact on the cost of the projects. "It's a way to provide a realistic assessment in a relatively short amount of time to the secretary, especially given the cost of the two facilities and how much attention they've been getting," one official with knowledge of the study told *NW&M Monitor*.

Costs Unclear

Both facilities are expected to be completed in 2020 and operational by 2022, but their price tags have been the subject of intense speculation among Congress, government, and industry officials. According to a three-year-old

cost range, the UPF is estimated to cost between \$1.4 and \$3.5 billion, but most officials expect that the facility could cost much more. Sen. Bob Corker (R-Tenn.) suggested earlier this year that the cost of UPF could land between \$4 and \$5 billion. Fiscal Year 2011 budget documents indicated that the CMRR-NF could cost more than \$4 billion, but like UPF, most officials believe the cost of the facility could be much higher, exceeding \$5 billion.

Don Cook, the NNSA's Deputy Administrator for Defense Programs, this summer initiated a review of the facilities' costs and requirements by DOE's Office of Cost Analysis (OCA) and the Pentagon's Cost Analysis and Performance Evaluation (CAPE) group—reviews that were preceded by reviews of the projects by the M&O contractors at Y-12 and Los Alamos. According to the NNSA, DOE's Office of Cost Analysis has completed its review of UPF costs and its report is being prepared. The OCA is planning to review CMRR-NF later this year. The Pentagon review of the projects hasn't begun yet, the agency said. Former National Ignition Facility project director Scott Samuelson also led an internal NNSA review earlier this year of the cost estimating processes for each project, and an independent review last year, while a review last year by former Defense programs chief Everet Beckner of UPF found that the facility was mostly sized appropriately for the nation's needs.

Increased Scrutiny Driving Reviews

Still, there has been significant pressure on the Administration to ensure that the facilities are sized appropriately and that officials have a solid grasp on their potential costs, considering the facilities are key to efforts to modernize the nation's weapons complex and have become a touchstone in the debate over the Senate's ratification of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty with Russia. Senate Republicans have pushed the Administration for adequate funding to modernize the weapons complex and arsenal, and while the Administration earlier this year committed \$80 billion over the next decade for the effort, Vice President Joseph Biden acknowledged last month that more resources would be needed for the modernization effort and promised to update the Administration's plans later this fall. Cook suggested in a previous interview with *NW&M Monitor* that he didn't believe much could be trimmed from the highly analyzed facilities, but the increased scrutiny has necessitated additional reviews, one official said, commenting on the rationale for the new study. "It's really to see based on their current design is it based on what is absolutely essential to carry out NNSA's mission, as opposed to what might be needed capability in the future that would be desirable to have but is not necessary," the official said. "The point is could they make some minor design changes to reduce the cost and stay within schedule and achieve savings without affecting the primary mission and scope of those facilities?" —*Todd Jacobson*

AS NEW ENVIRO. REVIEW OF CMRR -NF STARTS, FED SAYS NEPA BASE STRONG

A federal official involved in the planning of Los Alamos National Laboratory's Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement-Nuclear Facility conceded last week that the National Nuclear Security Administration probably moved too quickly to complete an environmental analysis of what has become a multi-billion-dollar project. However, the official's comments at a scoping meeting for a new environmental analysis suggest that the agency isn't likely to make any significant changes to its plans. "We tried to have our NEPA [National Environmental Policy Act] work early on, and maybe a bit too early," said Steve Fong, a member of NNSA's federal project team for the CMRRNF. "We did that in 2003 when we were in conceptual design, but at a time when there was debate about whether CMRR was the right thing for the nation."

Fong said taking a look at project's growth factor was an important question, but the site selection grew out of the previous NEPA foundation. "Yeah, we should probably be conservative and take a look at how we've grown and take a serious look, but we have a strong NEPA basis as of today," he said.

Enviro. Groups Help Spur New Review

Spurred in part by a push from New Mexico nuclear watchdogs—including an ongoing lawsuit by the Los Alamos Study Group—the NNSA has embarked on a new environmental review of the project, analyzing changes to planned facility since an Environmental Impact Statement was completed in 2004. The Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) will include an analysis of new nuclear safety requirements and modifications to accommodate changed understanding of seismic risks at the site, and the need to use more steel and concrete. But the study will also include an examination of the alternative of not building the project at all, but rather modifying the existing Chemistry and Metallurgy Research building so that it could continue to be used to meet the agency's programmatic needs. The Administration has said it needs the new facility, which could cost more than \$4 billion according to estimates, to help revitalize the lab's analytical chemistry, material characterization and actinide research and development work at the lab in support of the agency's plutonium research and pit surveillance activities.

A Fair Analysis of Alternatives?

Herman LeDoux, the federal project director for CMRRNF, deferred to NNSA headquarters when asked about whether it was possible to make an objective decision about alternatives so late in the process, when so much of the design was already committed to the current location. "Hopefully we get a lot of input and that's what we're looking for," he said, noting that most of the critical questions coming from the public have to do with program issues, not the kind of design and safety issues that his group is dealing with on the ground. "They're better answered by the program guys in Washington, D.C.," he said.

The NNSA held two scoping meetings on the new project last week—one in White Rock, N.M., Oct. 19, and a second in Pojoaque, N.M., Oct. 20—drawing nuclear watchdogs, young activists, representatives of religious organizations and many long-time lab critics who turned out to propose alternatives to the project, object to the process and register their dissatisfaction with LANL's primary mission, especially its plans to expand nuclear weapons activities over the next 10 years.

While the White Rock meeting was largely informational in nature, opponents of the project outnumbered supporters 20 to 1 at the Pojoaque meeting. Marlene Parrot, a Sister of Mercy and a member of the Partnership for Spirituality, was typical of those who condemned the environmental legacy of the laboratory and expressed dissatisfaction with the limited scope of the new environmental process. "We need a whole new environmental impact statement," she said. "I think we have to have hearings and I think the priority of the Energy Department should be clean up and restoration."

The deadline for public comment is Nov. 1. Officials said they hoped to complete the SEIS within nine months, by the end of July 2011, including an additional period of public comment after the draft document is released. The SEIS hasn't persuaded the Los Alamos Study Group to drop its lawsuit to halt work on the project. The group has argued that the 2004 Environmental Impact Statement bears so little resemblance to the project that is now underway that only a new and complete EIS can meet the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act. —*From staff reports*

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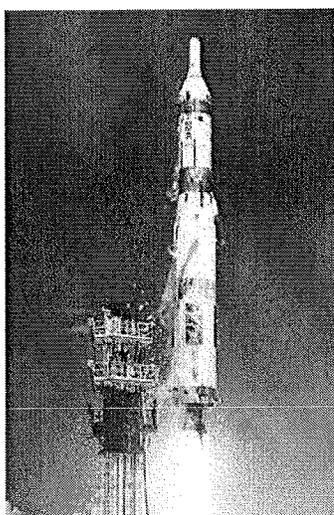
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[MORE](#)**START: Arms Affirmation Treaty**

By Darwin BondGraham October 29, 2010



The New START treaty should at best be called an “arms affirmation treaty,” confirming that expensive weapons systems, which include the nation's nuclear arsenal, remain a national priority. Like the earlier Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, New START insulates nuclear weapons spending, as well as large budgets for other weapons systems.

Thus far, the ratification debate in the U.S. Senate has assured funding for multi-billion-dollar missile defense and prompt global strike weapons systems, and has undermined the possibility of political opposition. Campaign contribution and lobbying disclosure data help explain why corporate contractors, with vested interests, have been able to influence both Republican and Democratic Senators throughout the ratification debate.

Ratification and the Budget

In April, President Barack Obama and Russian President Dmitri Medvedev signed the New START Treaty, meant to replace the START 1 treaty that expired in December 2009. For the United States to be party to the treaty, the Senate must approve. On September 16, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee reported the New START treaty to the Senate floor by a vote of 14-4. Should the Democrats believe they have enough Republican votes lined up for the two-thirds majority approval required for full-Senate ratification, the final vote will be scheduled after the November 2 elections.

Politicking aside, in normal years treaty ratification has nothing to do with issues of budget and planning. But 2010 has not been a normal year. Rocked by a declining economy and lower projected revenues, all branches of the federal government have been asked to prepare for deeper cuts. However, the New START treaty's ratification process has shielded nuclear weapons and other military programs from the budget axe. Pressure to ratify the treaty has created a dysfunctional situation in which Senate approval has been instrumentally tied to ever-increasing budgetary commitments for missile defense, prompt global

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SEATTLE (PGS), and nuclear and non-nuclear strategic weapons programs. The U.S. nuclear weapons complex, Missile Defense Agency, and Strategic Command (which oversees PGS) are using these negotiations as a proxy for a budget debate that isn't happening, and gain approval and funding for programs that in a normal legislative context would not necessarily be guaranteed. A comprehensive review of weapons program's true needs, especially the U.S. nuclear weapons arsenal, has thus not occurred.

Congress has not yet passed a FY2011 budget. Instead, Congress passed a continuing resolution (CR) in October, which typically funds government spending at the previous year's levels until the budget is approved. Without a budget, planning is very difficult for federal programs and agencies.

Because of pressure to ratify New START, the Obama administration made several exceptions within this recent CR. These exceptions allow for immediate increased spending on, and long-term planning for, nuclear weapons. For example, the National Nuclear Security Administration's (NNSA's) stop-gap budget is set at \$624 million over the 2010 levels. The CR is generously funding the NNSA plans to expand the nuclear weapons complex and conduct costly design and modification work on several nuclear warhead models. The United States is on track to spend upwards of \$7 billion on nuclear weapons in 2011 to modernize the U.S. nuclear weapons complex.

Arms Affirmation

The fiscal and political dynamics of the ratification process, fed by the right and left, are leading to outcomes contrary to the declared intent of the treaty -- disarmament.

Ratified or not, New START will be one of the costliest treaties negotiated between the White House and Senate in recent history. These deliberations have already resulted in deals that ensure that the military and its contractors will receive huge budget increases, including funding for a new plutonium bomb pit factory, a growing the missile defense program that is already as large as the NNSA nuclear weapons program, the conversion of nuclear-capable missiles into conventional strike weapons under the prompt global strike (PGS) weapons program, and a new generation of submarines and jets to deploy the nuclear arsenal.

The nominal reductions in deployed strategic nuclear weapons required by New START pale against the multi-billion dollar nuclear and non-nuclear weapons programs made possible by the treaty's text. Significantly, New START's reductions only address deployed strategic nuclear weapons, not tactical weapons or strategic weapons held in reserve. The treaty limits the signatory nations to a total strategic deployed arsenal of 1,550 warheads on 700 platforms each, platforms being the bombers and missiles that can launch these weapons. If the United States chooses to juggle warhead distribution among different platforms under the treaty's counting rules, it theoretically could increase the number of warheads currently deployed and have more than 1550 at the ready. Because of how the treaty counts nuclear weapons, the United States could choose to withdraw as few as 162 weapons from its arsenal to reach the mandated 1,550 warhead limit -- a mere eight percent decrease!

This is because the treaty counts each nuclear-capable bomber aircraft as one nuclear weapon, even though bombers are capable of carrying 16-20 nuclear weapons apiece. Thus, if the United States currently has 1,968 strategic weapons deployed on 798 platforms, it need only reduce the platform count by 98. It does not need to de-deploy 418 weapons to reach the 1550 limit. Rather, U.S. war planners can, if they choose to do so, upload cruise missiles and bombs onto bombers that are "reduced" from the ICBM and SLBM legs of the triad. The

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United States would then have 256 weapons hidden in 60 bombers. Since there is an upload capacity of 820 spaces for cruise missiles and bombs on these bombers, this theoretically would allow a deployment of well over the 1550 limit, as long as ICBM and SLBM weapons are reduced by 162.

Negotiations for the ratification of New START were conducted based on the provision in Article V of the treaty, which permits "modernization and replacement of strategic offensive arms." Thus, approval would not impede modernization of nuclear weapons or the nuclear weapons complex, nor would it impede ongoing and planned investments in missile defense and PGS weapons systems.

The Senate's ratification resolution calls on the executive branch to clarify its plans for the PGS weapons program, a new conventional weapons system that top White House advisors consider a viable strategic alternative to nuclear weapons. With respect to missile defense, the START Treaty ratification resolution states, "It is the understanding of the United States that [...] the New START Treaty does not impose any limitations on the deployment of the missile defenses other than the requirements of paragraph 3, Article V." This particular section imposes limits on the conversion of ICBMs and SLBMs for use as missile defense interceptors, but the treaty excludes existing Minuteman ICBMs situated at Vandenberg and Fort Greely Air Force Bases that are used in the Boeing-run ground missile defense system. Since the Pentagon is not requesting other ICBMs or SLBMs, as head of the Missile Defense Agency Lieutenant General Patrick O'Reilly has pointed out, there is no actual limitation.

In order to win Republican support necessary for passage, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chair John Kerry (D-MA) supported the substitution of his "Resolution of Advice and Consent" with Senator Richard Lugar's (R-IN) version, although Kerry's already contained a strong endorsement of nuclear modernization, missile defense, and PGS. Two amendments were added prior to the SFSC vote. Senator James Risch's (R-ID) amendment assures funding increases for new nuclear-weapons-capable submarines, missiles, and bombers (the strategic "triad"). Senator Jim DeMint's (R-SC) clause, meanwhile, emphasizes that the treaty does not prohibit the building of *any* missile defense system, especially one that achieves the vision of Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative - an impenetrable shield over North America ready to strike down one or thousands of warheads from the sky.

Lugar's approved resolution protects the nuclear modernization, missile defense, and prompt global strike provisions from the budget shortfalls that will affect most federal agencies in the upcoming fiscal years. Consequently, the ratification process has undercut the possibility of wide-ranging debate on the merits and costs of these weapons programs within and outside the halls of Congress. Centrist arms control groups, such as the Arms Control Association and Council for a Livable World, have emphasized that New START imposes neither limits on nuclear modernization nor missile defense in their op-eds and pro-ratification testimony. Liberal peace groups have tended to omit any references to provisions within the treaty that require nuclear modernization or additional weapons systems in their communications with constituents and the public. Ironically, many peace and security foundations and organizations -- from the Ploughshares Fund and the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, to the American Friends Service Committee and Peace Action West -- have lobbied aggressively for New START ratification, further empowering Republican Senators to demand even larger investments in nuclear and non-nuclear weapons programs.

Modernization of the Stockpile and Complex

In dollars, the amount required to overhaul and modernize the U.S. nuclear enterprise will be in the billions over the next two decades. The Obama administration's classified report, required by Section 1251 of the National Defense Authorization Act, outlines a large array of investments in nuclear weapons modernization programs. These include funds to sustain the large weapons research and design laboratories at Livermore, CA, and Los Alamos, NM. There will also be money to work directly on the nuclear stockpile by "reusing," "refurbishing," and even "replacing" components with newer and more advanced capabilities. Finally, the budget will cover rebuilding the complete core of the federal government's industrial nuclear complex where nuclear weapons and materials are fabricated, tested, and assembled. This capital investment program is one of the federal government's largest single commitments to any program, defense or non-defense.

By the National Nuclear Security Administration's own definition, a "major construction project" is any capital investment costing more than \$20 million. The agency currently has 14 such projects underway in the nuclear weapons complex. The largest will cost several billion. For example, the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement Nuclear Facility's last official estimate was \$3.2 billion, but sources close to the design process report that it is nearing the \$6 billion mark. If built, this project will house labs, workspaces, and vaults for storing plutonium. It would also be the most important (and expensive) part of the U.S. nuclear weapons manufacturing complex.

The Uranium Processing Facility may cost upwards of \$5 billion. The High Explosive Pressing Facility is scheduled to cost \$134 million. Both of these facilities will manufacture nuclear weapons components.

Seven of NNSA's 14 major construction projects have no total cost estimate. One facility, a manufacturing plant for U.S. nuclear weapon parts known as the KCRIMS project, has an estimated price tag of \$500 million. A private developer and the local government in the Kansas City area will pick up the tab on the front end. NNSA will lease it back for a cost of almost a billion dollars over its operating lifespan. Because of this creative financing, the KCRIMS project is omitted from NNSA's own construction accounting budget.

All of these capital projects are guaranteed funding increases under the Continuing Resolution and have been affirmed in multiple ways during the New START ratification debate. Excerpts from the FY2011 NNSA budget request show that many of the agency's planned construction investments in nuclear weapons manufacturing facilities have no final total cost estimate. The timeline in the administration's report, which shows future planning for the U.S. nuclear weapons complex, testifies to the deeply anti-disarmament agenda of the military, White House, and Senate.

In addition to these large construction projects, the FY2011 nuclear weapons budget is stocked with increased design and manufacturing accounts for nuclear weapons. For example, the Obama administration suggests spending \$249 million on a Life Extension Program (LEP) for the W76 warheads. LEPs involve complicated overhauls of nuclear weapons, from changes made to their design to refurbishment or replacement of aging components. With close to 770 of these W76 warheads in the deployed strategic stockpile, this weapon constitutes the true backbone of U.S. nuclear forces. Life extensions for these weapons will ultimately cost several billion dollars. Other LEPs with similar or even larger cost estimates, like the B-61 gravity bomb, are planned or underway.

Senate Brokerage of Arms Spending

A cursory analysis of campaign contributions helps explain why the Senate Foreign Relations Committee has crafted the treaty's language in such a way that New START assures large funding increases and authorization to move ahead with various weapons programs. Democrats and Republicans agree on increasing procurement budgets. The difference is by how much, with the Democrats requesting only somewhat less than Republicans.

Data culled from the U.S. Senate's lobbying disclosure database and the Center for Responsive Politics' Open Secrets database demonstrate that Democrats and Republicans both strongly protect the interests of nuclear weapons, missile defense, and PGS contractors, who are among their biggest financial supporters. Over the last five years, members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee have received more than \$765,000 in contributions from these contractors. Democrats led Republicans with approximately \$424,000 in contractor cash.

Senators receiving the most arms contractor cash were Christopher Dodd (D-CT), James Inhofe (R-OK), Jim DeMint (R-SC) and Jim Webb (D-VA). Sen. Dodd's lead is due to a singularly large pattern of contributions from United Technologies, a diversified military contractor headquartered in his home state of Connecticut. Without Dodd's \$115,250 in UT cash, the Democrats would trail Republicans in total weapons contractor contributions by about \$31,000. Only three Senators on the Committee, all Democrats, have reported no significant contributions from these contractors: Russell Feingold (D-WI), Robert Casey (D-PA), and Edward Kaufman (D-DE).

The largest cash contributions by corporations have come from United Technologies, Honeywell International, Northrop Grumman, Lockheed Martin, Raytheon, CH2M Hill, General Dynamics, and Boeing. Lockheed Martin is the prime contractor for the PGS "Conventional Strike Missile," a modified Minuteman III ICBM with a hypersonic "payload delivery vehicle" capable of attacking any point on earth within one hour. Boeing and Northrop Grumman are the prime contractors for the Missile Defense Agency's "Ground-based Midcourse Defense" weapons system. United Technologies, Raytheon, General Dynamics, and Honeywell have numerous contracts and subcontracts supporting these and other missile defense or PGS weapons programs.

These contractors also have the most active professional lobbies on Capitol Hill. Since the April 8 signing of New START, military contractors with stakes in missile defense have spent approximately \$59 million lobbying the Senate. Raytheon alone has spent \$22 million since April to employ its own lobbyists, as well as such firms as the Breaux Lott Leadership Group, Potomac Advocates, and DLA Piper, LLP.

In the same period, other military contractors have reported similarly large lobbying expenses for "missile defense." Lockheed Martin comes in at \$13 million, Boeing and Northrop Grumman both at \$9 million, Honeywell at \$1.6 million, and Orbital Sciences Corporation at \$500,000. Other lobbying firms employed by these corporations include Clark & Weinstock, McBee Strategic Consulting, The Foxtail Group, and Carter Consulting.

Although only a fraction of these expenses have been specifically allocated to lobby Senators to support missile defense and PGS, arms contractors have ably influenced the dynamics of New START ratification, ensuring there are no limits on these weapons programs or fiscal and political constraints.

The New START treaty and its ratification process affirm that costly nuclear and non-nuclear weapons systems remain a national priority, and confirm that arms

control treaties lead not toward general disarmament but toward increased investments in such weapons systems. Propelled by both peace and arms control nonprofits, as well as by arms contractors and their lobbyists, the ratification process has served as a proxy forum in which questions of budget and authorization for nuclear weapons, missile defense, and prompt global strike weapons systems have been hashed out in advance of nearly all other federal budget questions. Conditions for the treaty's ratification were linked early on to funding increases for these programs. Passage will signify the Senate's affirmation of further militarization. New START mostly allows for the status quo nuclear postures of the United States and Russia to remain intact.

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Darwin BondGraham is a board member of the Los Alamos Study Group and a sociologist. Direct all correspondence to darwin[at]riseup.net, Los Alamos Study Group, 2901 Summit Place NE, Albuquerque, NM 87016.

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Russ Wellen

"The U.S. nuclear weapons complex, Missile Defense Agency, and Strategic Command . . . are using these negotiations as a proxy for a budget debate that isn't happening, and gain approval and funding for programs that in a normal legislative context would not necessarily be guaranteed."

Talk about adding insult to injury -- the ultimate irony -- a new arms control treaty resulting in even more funding for the nuclear-industrial complex than usual.

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Francine Lindberg

This subsidization of weapons manufacturers is nothing more than the shameless theft of our tax dollars by the rich for the rich. US children are being warehoused in substandard schools while their parents search desperately for non-existent jobs and battle foreclosures. "Democracy" in the United States does not exist and won't be possible until money is banned from our political system. We need a constitutional amendment for the permanent separation of Corporatism and State.

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Volume 14 No. 44

November 1, 2010

At the Weapons Labs/DOE Sites

AT LOS ALAMOS STUDY GROUP FIGHTS MOTION TO DISMISS CMRR SUIT

Activists suing for a new environmental analysis of the National Nuclear Security Administration's proposed plutonium laboratory filed a motion Oct. 21 defending their action against a motion by federal officials claiming the suit should be thrown out. Attorney Thomas Hnasko, on behalf of the Los Alamos Study Group, argued in a 24-page motion that a new Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement now being prepared was inadequate given the substantial changes in the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement-Nuclear Facility (CMRR-NF), since the project's Environmental Impact Statement was completed in 2003.

The National Nuclear Security Administration launched the new supplemental analysis with mid-October scoping meetings in New Mexico (NW&M Monitor, Vol. 14 No. 43). But the Study Group argues that the process falls short of what is needed under the National Environmental Policy Act because of what the group says are substantial changes in CMRR-NF since the 2003 EIS and a 2004 Record of Decision were completed. The group would like a completely new EIS prepared and work to stop on the project.

Hnasko's motion also argues against the federal claim that a six-year statute of limitations on NEPA actions has run out, claiming the substantial changes in the project during the intervening years render such a claim moot. "The 2003 EIS concerned what amounts to a very different project, with much smaller environmental impacts," Hnasko argued. The Study Group has not said whether it will ask the court to halt work now underway, but both sides clearly have that possibility on their minds. Hnasko's brief pointedly mentions "283 employees or contractors ... now at work on the project," and argues that design work and site preparations now underway are being done without legally required NEPA coverage. The motion also notes the \$169 million for the project provided by the Continuing Resolution approved by Congress just prior to the end of the last fiscal year. Speaking privately, officials close to the project have begun building the case that any court action to halt work pending NEPA review would mean all those people would end up unemployed.

- Antiwar Radio with Scott Horton - <http://antiwar.com/radio> -

Darwin BondGraham

Posted By [Scott Horton](#) On November 4, 2010 @ 8:32 pm In [Nukes,START](#) | [1 Comment](#)

Audio clip: Adobe Flash Player (version 9 or above) is required to play this audio clip. Download the latest version [here](#) ^[1]. You also need to have JavaScript enabled in your browser.

Darwin BondGraham, member of the [Los Alamos Study Group](#) ^[2], discusses the [massive giveaways](#) ^[3] to weapons manufacturers that will occur after the Senate ratifies the New START Treaty, the "prompt global strike" capability that will let Obama rain death on anyone in the world in 30 minutes or less [insert pizza delivery joke here], billions budgeted for new nuclear weapons infrastructure, the loophole in START accounting methods that makes a joke of mandatory weapons reductions and why well-intentioned arms reduction treaties often do more harm than good.

[MP3 here](#) ^[4]. (21:25)

Darwin BondGraham is a member of the Los Alamos Study Group. He's an ethnographer and historian with a PhD in sociology. His current work focuses on economic and social development and he writes occasionally for Counterpunch, Z Magazine and Foreign Policy in Focus.

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November 15, 2010

PROCUREMENTS RELATED TO CMRR-NF PROCESS ON HOLD DUE TO NEPA REVIEW

The National Nuclear Security Administration has suspended all procurements related to the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement-Nuclear Facility while the agency updates the environmental analysis of the multi-billion-dollar facility, a senior Los Alamos National Laboratory official said last week. The move, which is required under the National Environmental Policy Act, could jeopardize the laboratory's plans to complete work to establish the performance baseline for the infrastructure needed for the project in 2011, said Tony Ladino, the project manager for support facilities on the CMRR project. "It'll be a timing thing," Ladino told *NW&M Monitor*. "We'll have to be as agile and responsive as we can be so when the government has finished the NEPA process, we can move to procurements in a quick and efficient way."

Spurred in part by a push from New Mexico nuclear watchdogs including an ongoing lawsuit by the Los Alamos Study Group—the NNSA announced in September that it was preparing a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for the CMRR-NF, analyzing changes to the project since an Environmental Impact Statement was completed in 2004. The SEIS hasn't satisfied the Los Alamos Study Group, which is still pursuing its lawsuit and pushing for the NNSA to redo the EIS rather than simply update it. The SEIS will include an analysis of new nuclear safety requirements and modifications to accommodate changed understanding of seismic risks at the site, and the need to use more steel and concrete to build the facility. But the study will also include an examination of the alternative of not building the project at all, but rather modifying the existing Chemistry and Metallurgy Research building so that it could continue to be used to meet the agency's programmatic needs. The Administration has said it needs the new facility, which could cost more than \$4 billion according to estimates, to help revitalize the lab's analytical chemistry, material characterization and actinide research and development work at the lab in support of the agency's plutonium research and pit surveillance activities.

Design Work Not Stopped

A separate Radiological Laboratory/Office/Utility Building has already been built adjacent to where the nuclear facility will be constructed, and work is ongoing to install specialized equipment in facility. That work has not stopped, Ladino said. He said preliminary design work on the CMRR-NF project is also continuing as procurement activity on the project has come to a halt, impacting nearly a dozen procurements for which the lab had begun releasing information over the last month. Those include procurements for the excavation of the site for the facility, the construction of a lay-down yard, the relocation of site utilities as well as the procurement of specialized items like nuclear air treatment systems, safety class fire pumps and safety significant air handling equipment.

Ladino declined to estimate how much the suspension of procurements could delay progress on the facility, which is the subject of considerable scrutiny given its importance to plans to modernize the NNSA's nuclear weapons complex. Senate Republicans have insisted on funding to modernize the complex in exchange for support of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty with Russia, and along with the Uranium Processing Facility, the CMRR-NF

is the plan's linchpin. Both facilities are expected to cost in excess of \$5 billion when new estimates are completed, and they are expected to be completed by 2020 and up and running by 2022.

Ladino said that the lab is preparing a phased Critical Decision 2/3 package for the project, authorizing a performance baseline and the start of construction, that starts with the infrastructure portion of project. Separate packages would then be completed for the facility and the outside of the plant, which includes the security features surrounding the facility. Ladino said he was hopeful that the SEIS was completed quickly, allowing the procurements to move forward. "It is a challenge for sure, but NEPA is a federal law and big projects sometimes have to update their NEPA and that's what we're doing," he said. "We will just have to be ready and flexible to jump on the procurements as soon as we get green light." —*Todd Jacobson*

SANTA FE NEW MEXICAN.com

Environmental concerns circle LANL project

By Roger Snodgrass | The New Mexican

11/15/2010

An official of the nation's nuclear weapons agency said design work would continue on the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement nuclear facility at Los Alamos National Laboratory, even as a supplemental environmental review is under way.

National Nuclear Security Administration spokeswoman Jennifer Wagner said the agency is proceeding deliberately in order to meet its obligations required for a supplemental environmental impact statement.

The nuclear security group is under legal pressure to begin the environmental process from scratch because of significant changes of scale and cost. The agency has agreed to a more modest supplemental review, but a court challenge disputes that as insufficient.

On Friday, the Los Alamos Study Group filed a preliminary injunction to stop NNSA from spending any funds on "design or construction" of the multibillion-dollar facility or on an associated security perimeter until the environmental issue has been settled.

The study group's complaint describes a project that was expected to take 34 months, but is now scheduled to last 12 years in a project area that has quadrupled and for which construction materials have multiplied many times.

Before the court came up, LANL officials described a project that had expanded to include several other construction sites in the Pajarito corridor. Along with the security perimeter for the new building, the work would include a revitalization program for the Plutonium Facility, a replacement for the Radioactive Liquid Waste Treatment Facility and work on the Transuranic Waste Facility.

According to the most recent petition from the study group, the work would encompass at least eight technical areas and includes the relocation of Pajarito Road.

One question is whether NNSA has already decided on the nuclear facility and whether it is so invested its own plans that it would be impossible to choose a different course.

"It looks to me like they crossed the Rubicon a long time ago," said Lindsay Lovejoy, a Santa Fe lawyer, who has joined the plaintiff's legal team.

A lab official in a community presentation in June said 35 construction packages were planned and

the beginning of the infrastructure package was scheduled for March 2011.

In an affidavit, Don Cook, NNSA's deputy administrator for defense programs, said \$210 million had been spent in six years of building design and analysis and that the overall project design was less than 50 percent complete.

Stopping the project, he wrote, would involve "firing most, if not all, of the 283 LANL and contract staff" employed on it.

He also swore that no construction was under way, nor would occur.

The question of NNSA's intentions arose Friday, when the Nuclear Weapons and Materials Monitor reported that a LANL procurement officer had suspended all procurements on the chemistry and metallurgy project.

Contacted at the laboratory, support facilities manager Tony Ladino referred a reporter to NNSA headquarters in Washington, D.C., saying that his remarks had been taken out of context.

NNSA officials have been consistent about their intention to continue the design work, but did not directly respond to the question about construction procurement.

Meanwhile, estimates for that project have grown from a projected \$3.7 billion to a range of \$3.7 billion to \$5.8 billion, according the Nuclear Weapons and Materials Monitor.

Contact Roger Snodgrass at roger.sno@gmail.com.



LOS ALAMOS STUDY GROUP



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Friday, November 19, 2010
 Nuclear Spending Plan Up
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 By John Fleck

The Obama administration on Thursday laid out a new nuclear weapons spending plan that is 20 percent higher than the budgets left by the Bush administration and 5 to 6 percent higher than the administration spending plan last spring.

Included is an acknowledgment that a proposed new Los Alamos plutonium lab complex, originally budgeted at \$600 million when it was approved in 2004, could cost as much as \$5.8 billion by the time it is completed in 2020.

The plan projects spending \$85 billion over the next decade for the National Nuclear Security Administration, the agency that funds and oversees nuclear weapons research and development at Sandia and Los Alamos labs in New Mexico.

The proposed budget increase, made public as part of the administration's campaign to win support for an arms control treaty with Russia, includes money to cover rising pension costs at Los Alamos and Sandia national laboratories, along with additional money for refurbishing aging nuclear weapons.

The pledge to push for increased spending was unusual, coming two months before the administration's traditional February budget release.

The carrot of additional money for the labs and other parts of the nuclear weapons program came with a stick, however — the suggestion that if the Senate does not act now, during the lame duck session, the chances for the additional funding may diminish.

"We have an opportunity to ratify this treaty and to lock in consensus on modernization funding," Secretary of State Hillary Clinton told reporters during a Wednesday morning briefing.

Clinton's comments came as Senate Republicans, led by Sen. Jon Kyl, R-Ariz., suggested action on the treaty be put off until next year, when a new Congress takes office.

The numbers made public show continued growth in the cost of major nuclear facilities in New Mexico and Tennessee, but don't specify how the rest of the additional money would be distributed among nuclear weapons research and manufacturing sites around the country.

One project singled out in the new data is the Los Alamos Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement building. Last February, federal officials said they had no solid estimate of its cost because design work is still under way, but put a \$3.4 billion "placeholder" in the federal budget. According to numbers made public Thursday, with 45 percent of the design work on the building complete, the estimated project cost is now between \$3.7 billion and \$5.8 billion.

The project is a victim of "early optimism bias," common to complex, one-of-a-kind technical efforts, according to Don Cook, the head of the Office of Defense Programs in the National Nuclear Security Administration.

Cook, a former Sandia Labs manager who now oversees the agency's nuclear work, said in a recent interview that efforts are under way to come up with a clearer picture of how much the massive concrete complex will cost.

One reason for the increase in estimated cost is the need to make it safe in the event of an earthquake.

Critics say cost figures should be more carefully nailed down before Congress commits to the building, which would be the largest public construction project in New Mexico history.

With the rising costs, a clear-eyed look at other options to meet the nuclear weapons complex is needed, said Greg Mello, head of the Albuquerque-based Los Alamos Study Group. Mello's group is suing the federal government, alleging it has failed to fully consider alternatives to the project before proceeding.

"It's hard to believe that at these prices there's not cheaper alternatives," Mello said Thursday.

The administration also released revised numbers showing the cost of the new Uranium Processing Facility at the Y-12 nuclear weapons plant in Tennessee has risen to somewhere between \$4.2 billion and \$6.5 billion. That is up from an estimated cost range of \$1.4 billion to \$3.5 billion last February.

Critics have questioned whether the government can afford to build both multibillion dollar projects simultaneously. The White House, in a statement, said that is the plan. "The Administration is committed to requesting the funds necessary to ensure completion of these facilities."

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Volume 14 No. 47

November 22, 2010

AT LOS ALAMOS STUDY GROUP FILES FOR CMRR-NF INJUNCTION

Activists pushing for a new environmental analysis of Los Alamos National Laboratory's Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement-Nuclear Facility project filed a motion in federal court Nov. 12 asking for an injunction stopping work on the project while the review is completed. The Los Alamos Study Group alleged in a suit filed last summer that the Environmental Impact Statement published in 2004 for CMRR-NF is inadequate because of major changes in the project since then, including new data on seismic risk that has significantly driven up the cost and scope of the project's construction. The National Nuclear Security Administration has agreed to complete a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement, an update on the 2004 analysis, but the Study Group argues that a full EIS, including a review of alternatives, is required.

The group's motion calls continuing work on the project "one of the most massive and expensive violations of the National Environmental Policy Act ... that has ever been imposed on the American people." The problem, according to the Study Group, is that continued design work in Fiscal Year 2011 has the effect of prejudicing a decision. The National Environmental Policy Act "put simply, requires federal projects of this type, which have a significant impact on the human environment, to be preceded by an environmental impact statement." Continued spending while the environmental review is not yet completed renders the project "a fait accompli," the request for an injunction alleges.

Lawsuit Highlights Contradictions

The Study Group has exploited an apparent contradiction between federal officials' pronouncements in the litigation and their public statements in the run-up to Senate consideration of the New START treaty in the lame duck congressional session. In recent public statements, Administration officials have repeatedly expressed their commitment to building CMRR-NF, a side effect of the intense bargaining underway with Sen. Jon Kyl (R-Ariz.) and others in an attempt to win support for the Russian agreement. In that context, support for CMRR-NF is key to demonstrating commitment to nuclear infrastructure modernization. But in testimony submitted in connection with the Study Group's lawsuit, NNSA Defense Programs chief Don Cook repeatedly used caveats in his statements. For example, discussing the design work underway now, prior to completion of the Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement, Cook said "the design activities during this period will enhance our understanding of the requirements for the project and will save a substantial amount of time and taxpayer money in the event that construction ultimately goes forward."

Lab and National Nuclear Security Administration officials declined public comment on the filing, but privately suggested that as many as 300 contractors and lab employees might be out of work if an injunction is granted. There also are fears of delay in the politically sensitive project, which become one of the keystones in the Senate debate over whether to ratify the New START treaty.

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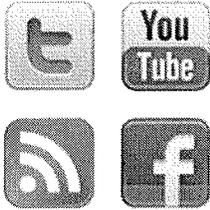
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The Front Lines of Disarmament: Blocking a Nuclear Facility Six Times the Cost of the Manhattan Project

By Russ Wellen, November 29, 2010

That is, six times the cost of the division of the Manhattan Project (to develop nuclear weapons during World War II) that was based in New Mexico. The heart of it -- what later became known as Los Alamos National Laboratory. Odds are, with the Cold War consigned to history, you couldn't have imagined that a nuclear weapons facility of such immensity was still on the table.

Greg Mello is the executive director of the Los Alamos Study Group (LASG), which, since 1989, has been spearheading nuclear disarmament in New Mexico, and, consequently, the nation. Since 1999, it has concentrated on halting or, failing that, downsizing a building project at Los Alamos called the Chemical and Metallurgical Research Replacement Nuclear Facility (CMRR). The intended function of this facility is to increase the capacity to produce new plutonium pits. The actual site of the nuclear fission, they're the beating heart of the warhead.

The CMRR, writes Greg Mello in a press release, "was marketed to Congress as a \$350 million building [but] has grown to an estimated \$4.3 billion." The "per square foot of useful space has grown to more than 100 times what [Los Alamos's] existing plutonium facility cost in 1978, in constant dollars [adjusted for inflation]."

How, you're probably wondering, in these economic times, could we be embarking on an endeavor more vast than the Manhattan Project? If we were, shouldn't it be, instead of weapons, a flagship form of alternative energy?

Cognitive dissonance on our part aside, over the years, LASG devised a plan with the help of a law firm. Under the National Environmental Policy Act they filed suit to stop all funding for and work on the CMRR until a new Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was prepared. Nor is this just a legal maneuver: a new EIS is sorely needed.

"The Los Alamos Study Group," reads the the original suit for an EIS (apologies for yet more abbreviations), "alleges that the DOE [Department of Energy] and NNSA [National Nuclear Security Administration] have violated the National Environmental Protection Act [NEPA] by preparing to construct [the CMRR] without an applicable [EIS]. . . . NNSA wrote an EIS for an earlier version of the facility in 2003. At that time the facility was to cost one-tenth as much, use one-fiftieth as much concrete, take one-fourth the time to build, and entail far fewer environmental impacts.

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In fact:

Many of the project's difficulties can be traced to just a few major causes. . . . Changes . . . helped drive the proposed facility underground [not figuratively, literally] -- into a thick stratum of loose volcanic ash which cannot support it. [Especially since the] magnitude and frequency of earthquakes expected at the site has increased dramatically, requiring much heavier construction.

Said construction would entail (emphasis added):

- A new excavated depth of 125 feet . . . and *replacement of an entire geologic stratum* beneath the building with 225,000 cubic yards of concrete and grout;
- . . . 29-fold increases . . . in structural concrete and steel;
- Greatly increased total acreage, sprawling over many technical areas at LANL;
- Anywhere from 20,000 to 110,000 heavy truck trips to and from Los Alamos County;
- A decade-long construction schedule, up from less than 3 years

Bear in mind that the United States already has "approximately 24,000 . . . tested, stockpiled pits for each delivery system" and "these pits last essentially forever." LASG "believes there are many simpler, cheaper, faster, less risky, and less environmentally damaging alternatives to [the CMRR, which] let alone any other . . . is poorly justified from the nuclear deterrence perspective."

Has LASG's strategy proven effective? On November 15 *Nuclear Weapons and Materials Monitor* reported (emphasis added):

The National Nuclear Security Administration has suspended all procurements related to the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement-Nuclear Facility while the agency updates the environmental analysis of the multi-billion-dollar facility. . . . The move . . . could jeopardize the laboratory's plans to complete work . . . for the project in 2011. . . .

Spurred in part by a push from New Mexico nuclear watchdogs including an ongoing lawsuit by the Los Alamo Study Group -- the NNSA announced in September that it was preparing a Supplemental [EIS] for the CMRR. [Said Supplemental] hasn't satisfied the Los Alamos Study Group, which is still pursuing its lawsuit and pushing for the NNSA to redo the EIS rather than simply update it. . . . But the [NNSA] study will also include an examination of the alternative of not building the project at all, but rather modifying the existing Chemistry and Metallurgy Research building.

The first highlighted phrase shows the effect that LASG is having on the NNSA. The second shows how pragmatic LASG's tactics are. Although total disarmament is its ultimate goal, it keeps its eye on the first line of defense: curbing expansion and waste at Los Alamos.

"The simple hallmark of good policy, is to spend less money"

I contacted Greg Mello and asked him to expand on LASG's strategy. To begin with, he states in one of his press releases:

CMRR . . . should not be desirable to weapons administrators because there are much better, less managerially risky, cheaper, and safer facility options for preserving U.S. nuclear weapons. [And we] have already developed a set of reasonable alternatives to this facility and anticipate working productively with the review team and with Congress.

I just wanted to hear Mello confirm in his own words that the underlying

strategy behind the above statements is to walk the world back toward disarmament by working with the nuclear-industrial complex one step at a time. His reply, with my annotation and emphases, follows. Excuse the prejudicial statement, but let's hope that you find it as brimming with insight as I did.

Consider the matter from two perspectives: a) values, or timelessness, or eternity if you want to put it that way, or an *ideal*; and b) historical process, management reality, political decisions today, or *realpolitik*. [Most of our work] addresses both. We have to.

If we express only absolutist "positions" . . . we will play into the hands of the "antinuclear nuclearists,"* which is a militarist strategy designed in part to emphasize, or capitalize upon, an absence of *realpolitik*. We will be easily manipulated.

*Anti-nuclear nuclearism, as LASG defines it, is "a foreign and military policy that relies upon overwhelming U.S. power, including the nuclear arsenal, but makes rhetorical and even some substantive commitments to disarmament, however vaguely defined." Mello continues.

I think we must try to place ourselves in the position of those in government who make real decisions, and offer steps . . . to embody our values. . . . *We are not more pure than they are. . . . They have a job to do and we have to help them or we are not doing our job. . . .*

At present, effective steps toward disarmament and effective steps toward more effective management of the nuclear enterprise can be the same. How? . . . NNSA believes it must modernize the arsenal, replace old weapons with newly-designed ones, and provide the capability for large-scale manufacturing. It is these goals which drive about one-third to half the existing budget, and all the budget increases proposed by Obama and demanded by Republicans. Wiping out these goals would wipe about about 60% of Los Alamos and most of Livermore. Sandia would be affected much less, and the plants much less still.

Wiping out all this spending would bring us toward rationality overall and within NNSA. We would [still] be dealing with an abusive, violent relative, to be sure, but he would not also be drunk.

Mello provides more little-known insights into the National Nuclear Security Administration.

Officially, NNSA has a goal of nuclear disarmament, since the [nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty] was signed and entered into force. . . . It also has a goal of nuclear weapons sustainment. [Significantly, though, it] does not yet quite have a goal of modernization, but is sidling there. NNSA ignores the disarmament side of its mission. It could decrease the dissonance by construing its [supposed] deterrence goal [even] in a conservative manner. That would help disarmament a lot.

We find that all parties who want to understand us (as opposed to those who seek to harm us, which are unreachable anyway), from the hard-core abolitionists, of which we are one, to active weapons managers, understand all this pretty well and respect our attempt to reconcile God and man as it were.

The golden road right now, the simple hallmark of good policy, is to spend less money. This is almost an absolute good, as I see it. Money spent equals the value of nuclear weapons in society, *mas o minus*. The chief distinguishing characteristic of the co-opted is that *they want to build up in*

order to build down. They want to build up the [Nevada Test site] budget or the Pantex [nuclear weapons assembly and disassembly plant] budget in order to increase the rate of dismantlement, for example.

Wrong. Dismantlement eats into [life extension programs], at present, which is just fine. That's how it should be. It's a real tradeoff. Why decrease the pressure on NNSA to choose? They want to build new factories in New Mexico, increasing the budget "in the short run," while there are perfectly good facilities elsewhere. Wrong. The Weapons Activities budget is far too big and should decrease monotonically. . . .

What is real is effectively symbolic. What is merely symbolic is not real. (A dictum of ours this year.)

So who is the audience, you will ask? That has to sort itself out. The masses are powerless, uninterested, and disengaged, so -- not them.

Politically, I think we must all recognize that *we cannot push what we ourselves need to do onto some posited others who will not ever act politically in any meaningful way*, just a sort of "pretend" activity aimed at the next foundation grant, etc. There is a huge difference between reaching to others politically, for actual, effective political action, and reaching to others for mere legitimization of an elite perspective, career, or institution.

Which, in the end, is why LASG has demonstrated proven effectiveness -- as opposed to impotence on the part of certain disarmament organizations to which he alludes in the preceding paragraph.

In LASG's November 23 press release, Mello describes the cost and scale of the CMRR as "a bellwether for our society. At those unprecedented prices something -- our society or the project -- has to break. . . . *That's part of the point.* The folks planning this thing at LANL know perfectly well the sorry state of federal finance. Nevertheless they are bending every effort to make sure the federal government is fully vested in this project *before* the full crisis hits. Their primary consideration is to make sure they, and the rest of nation's nuclear establishment, end up on top. Social needs, renewable energy, avoiding climate catastrophe, and in final analysis human survival -- all these are expendable goals, just like they have always been in the nuclear bomb business."

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LANL has \$6.4 billion disarmament question

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Wednesday, December 01, 2010

LANL Has \$6.4 Billion Disarmament Question

By Peter Neils, President
Los Alamos Study Group

In a press release dated November 17th, the Obama administration states that: "President Obama has made an extraordinary commitment to ensure the modernization of our nuclear infrastructure, which had been neglected for years before he took office."

The narrative of reversing years of neglect is at the core of much of Mr. Obama's drive to invest tens of billions of dollars in the nation's nuclear weapon's infrastructure. Yet, one might ask, what is the source this "neglect"?

The short answer is it is the deferral of routine facility maintenance and upgrades, not a lack of money, as the press release captioned above would lead one to believe, since funding for the complex has essentially doubled since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

How can facility deterioration occur in that fiscal environment if not through conscious managerial neglect? Could it be that administrators are "running to failure" buildings that might otherwise be depended on for many more years of service in an effort to get new buildings? It would seem possible for the most technologically advanced institution in history to be capable of building structures that can be serviceable more than 50 years.

Los Alamos National Laboratory had, circa 2000, a comprehensive plan to upgrade the existing Chemical and Metallurgical Research facility to extend its working life well into the future. Then one day someone, or some group of folks, said something like; "Heck, what'd really be cool is a slick new building to promote the mission and attract new talent..." and the Chemical and Metallurgical Research Replacement (CMRR) facility Boondoggle Express was off and running.

Initially paraded out at around \$350 million, today's best estimate, with no cost basis yet on the horizon, is \$6.4 billion. In other words, if this were your ultimate fantasy, never-before-attempted custom home, initially quoted at \$1,000,000, the estimated cost would now be \$18,285,714 (a cost overrun of a factor of 18), but don't convert your construction loans to a mortgage yet... it's still not finished! And this is just one part of Mr. Obama's nuclear dream.

So what does this "extraordinary commitment" by Mr. Obama really mean?

Is it, as many suggest, an effort to gin up Republican support for the new START treaty, the cost of which few in the arms control community appear prepared to concede now clearly outweighs the benefits by any rational analysis? Further, the president could hardly send a more conflicting signal to our international colleagues; "We need to spend an additional eighty billion dollars to ensure the reliability of our nuclear stockpile so we can go ahead and dismantle it. ..." Say what?

Alternately, perhaps he never really meant to pursue disarmament in a serious way to begin with. As the Los Alamos Study Group has previously observed, recently joined by columnist James P. Rubin in a Nov. 21 op-ed in the New York Times (Farewell to the Age of the Treaty), most, if not all, of Mr. Obama's stated nuclear agenda could be achieved through domestic legislation and executive action. This would require a simple majority in Congress, not 67 very expensive votes in the Senate, if disarmament actually were the president's long-term goal.

So ... do Democrats really want to take logical, practical, substantive (as opposed to rhetorical) steps toward disarmament any more than Republicans? That is the \$80 billion question.

Many of the liberal supporters of Mr. Obama's nuclear agenda — nominally arms control advocates — occasionally promote conversion of Los Alamos to pursuits they see as more benign, a favorite being alternative energy research.

Paradoxically, they now are working for, and getting, conversion, but it is from a nuclear research facility to a nuclear manufacturing facility. Does their zeal for ratification of the new START treaty blind them to the broader implications of their effort?

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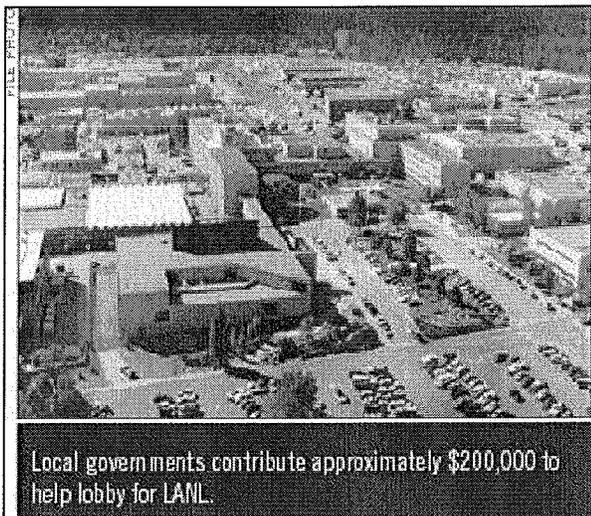
DUKE ON THE HILL

Local governments shell out for LANL coalition.

December 8, 2010

BY WREN ABBOTT wren@sfreporter.com

While local governments hope that membership in a new coalition will allow them to participate more in the development of Los Alamos National Laboratory projects, a watchdog group warns that the idea smacks of a feudal system, with the communities paying fealty to their high-tech overlord.



The Regional Coalition of LANL Communities was spearheaded by the Los Alamos County Council to rally local governments' support for lobbying Washington to fund certain types of LANL projects. Los Alamos County is contributing as much as \$150,000 to the start-up costs, while the City of Santa Fe and Santa Fe County are each contributing \$10,000; Rio Arriba County, \$18,000; the City of Española, \$14,000; and Taos County, \$3,750.

The funding contribution for each community is based on the percentage of lab employees who live in that jurisdiction. The approximately \$200,000 total will pay the salary of an executive director and a program manager.

Los Alamos County put out a request for proposals for the lobbying firm to represent the coalition and has so far received two bids, but won't release their names until the procurement process is over, Los Alamos County spokeswoman Julie Habiger says.

Los Alamos County Councilman Mike Wheeler tells SFR the purpose of the coalition is to "protect and preserve jobs, diversity and cleanup efforts at the laboratory." He says the coalition should support development of non-weapons-related research at LANL, possibly opening up more opportunities for the surrounding communities.

Santa Fe Mayor David Coss gives the example of a company originally called Clear Air Systems that developed out of technology created at the lab and, ultimately, brought 60 jobs to Santa Fe. He hopes that the coalition will be able to foster similar ventures.

Santa Fe County Commissioner Kathy Holian says she thinks a regional coalition is likely to have more power to secure money for cleanup and other projects than LANL would by itself.

And Taos County Commission Chairman Daniel Barrone wants to see the development of a LANL satellite campus based in Taos.

Wheeler says that's not an unrealistic idea, though at this point in the process, those types of ideas are just "pie in the sky."

Still, Wheeler says, representatives of US Sens. Tom Udall and Jeff Bingaman, D-NM, and of US Rep. Ben Ray Luján, D-NM, "didn't discount this idea that there would be some federal funds available to help support" new LANL projects.

But Greg Mello, executive director of nuclear disarmament activism group Los Alamos Study Group, says local government officials are signing on because they have naive expectations that they can influence LANL projects, as well as concerns of being perceived as disloyal to an important regional employer.

"There's a natural fear that they'll be left out of some sort of patronage from the laboratory—be perceived as non-cooperating and punished somehow," Mello tells SFR. "It's kind of a feudal structure where you're just afraid to offend the duke on the hill."

Barrone and Coss acknowledge one reason their communities are involved is to show support for LANL as an important employer.

"That's part of it, yes," Barrone tells SFR. "I mean, I have a history at the lab; my parents and my grandparents worked at the lab. It created jobs when there was no jobs, and it's still creating jobs when there was no jobs."

Los Alamos County also approached each of the eight northern pueblos, but only Tesuque has expressed an interest to sign the joint powers agreement, Wheeler says. Unlike the non-tribal governments in the coalition, Tesuque is not required to contribute financially.

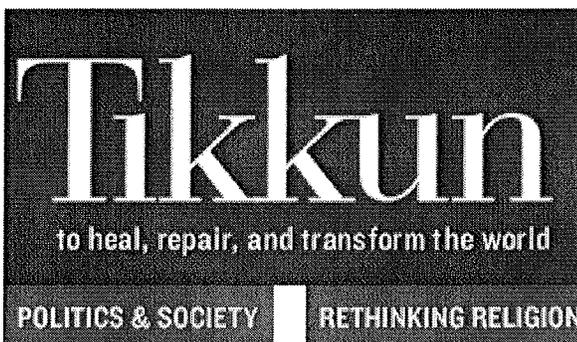
Wheeler says the funding contributions are, in some ways, a token gesture by which the participating communities can show they buy into the idea of "ensuring the sustainability and the future of our community."

Mello says that the idea of cash-strapped local governments contributing funds to a Los Alamos-centered project seems lopsided.

"Local government funds are being used to hire a lobbying firm for the lab," Mello says. "And that's really wrong. Local government has a lot of problems of their own, and the lab is very, very rich. It's the largest institution in New Mexico. It doesn't need financial help from Santa Fe or any other government."

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New START is a force-affirmation treaty, designed to clarify, but not change or disarm, U.S. and Russian nuclear arms. There is no disarmament required by the treaty. There is no indication that it is a "first step" toward "further" "disarmament."

"New START" Ratification Likely End of Obama's "Disarmament Vision," and of Arms Control Era, as New Political Alignments, Fresh Crises Loom

Contact: Greg Mello, 505-265-1200 office, 505-577-8563 cell

Albuquerque, NM -- What began as a business-as-usual replacement for a Cold War arms treaty, and then became a major legislative challenge for the Obama Administration, was finally ratified by the U.S. Senate today after unusually-involved negotiations with Senate Republicans. New START is a force-affirmation treaty, designed to clarify, but not change or disarm, U.S. and Russian nuclear arms. There is no disarmament required by the treaty. There is no indication that it is a "first step" toward "further" "disarmament."

These negotiations resulted in extensive commitments by the Administration to new spending and upgrades to U.S. strategic armaments, including nuclear weapons and nuclear weapons infrastructure, missile defense research, development, and deployments, and continued development of conventional global strike weapons -- much of which is applicable to nuclear delivery systems as well, being currently barred only by (mutable) law.

Ultra-accurate submarine-launched ballistic missile delivery systems have already been developed (but not deployed) under this last program.

The full cost of this treaty cannot yet be assessed, as not all the details of understandings reached have been made public, and the full import of some which have depends on future decisions and events. Just this week, and on top of announcements of two major increases in nuclear weapons spending, President Obama promised four Senators (including two Democrats) that nuclear weapons complex spending would be exempt from any future fiscal austerity measures that might otherwise apply to appropriations in the Energy and Water subcommittees. The prior increases are posted here and analyzed here and elsewhere at www.lasg.org.

The long struggle to ratify the treaty, and its huge final cost in the very coin of arms control which the treaty purports to advance, signals just how weak the Cold War arms control consensus has become. Prospects for ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), for example, appear nil for the foreseeable future. The U.S. will ratify this treaty, if it does, only when its progressive ratification by other states has reached a point of embarrassment wholly incompatible with U.S. geostrategic ambitions.

The way forward for arms controllers is not clear. Russia has made clear on numerous occasions that it has no intention of pursuing further nuclear cuts and has halted the financially-driven erosion of its nuclear forces. With Russia now the world's largest oil producer and the supplier of a controlling fraction of natural gas to Europe -- a fraction that is expected to grow considerably in the coming years -- Russia is not the weak negotiating partner that it was during, say, the START II negotiations. The reality of Russian power -- and U.S. weakness vis-a-vis military operations in the oil- and gas-rich regions south of Russia -- was not lost on Republican ratification opponents.

While on their face most of the Republican objections to ratification appeared foolish and ill-informed, these objections also conveyed a deep unease about the future of American global power, which is hardly misplaced.

The makeup of the incoming House and Senate (112th) is likely to be much more hostile to arms control than the (111th) Congress now concluding.

Looking ahead, prospects for conventional arms control appear worse. There are 23 Democratic Senate seats up for election in 2012, including 2 independents who caucus with the Democrats, compared to only 10 Republican seats. In 2014 Democrats are currently expected to have 20 seats up for election, and Republicans 13, although obviously this could change. For these and other reasons, prospects for conventional arms control measures appear bleak for the foreseeable future.

At the same time fresh and far more severe crises are looming, which, in their earliest manifestations, have already begun to capture Congress's (and voters') attention.

The implications for the New Mexico laboratories are complex. As noted here, they will suffer from an unprecedented infusion of cash -- about six times the total scale of the Manhattan Project in New Mexico, measured in constant dollars. But will this bring better morale, better science, better community relations, a more wholesome community in Los Alamos -- or even better stockpile management? That is very far from assured. The reverse, I think, is very likely true. The best days of Los Alamos are in the past, and if the day ever dawns when excavation begins on the giant plutonium complex slated to cost a factor of ten more any federal or state project ever conceived for New Mexico, save the Interstate Highways, it will be a dark day.

As Robert Oppenheimer put it on the 16th of October, 1945, "If atomic bombs are to be added as new weapons to the arsenals of a warring world, or to the arsenals of nations preparing for war, then the time will come when mankind will curse the names of Los Alamos and Hiroshima. The people must unite, or they will perish."

Now we know that it may or not be atomic weaponry which kills them, but rather the distraction they have brought, and misprioritization of scarce resources they incur. Today's treaty ratification is not an occasion of joy for the world, but rather a somber warning of the failure of our political system to understand and defend against the true dangers we face.



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At the Weapons Labs/DOE Sites

AT LOS ALAMOS NNSA DETAILS HARMFUL IMPACTS OF CMRR-NF INJUNCTION

An injunction in a lawsuit over environmental compliance for Los Alamos National Laboratory's proposed Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement-Nuclear Facility could harm U.S. arms control efforts, a top National Nuclear Security Administration official said in an affidavit filed in the case Dec. 20. "Timely construction of the CMRR-NF is . . . critical to the United States' commitment to renew and strengthen the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty ("NPT") and to enter into new treaty obligations, including the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty ("START") and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty ("CTBT)," said Roger Snyder, deputy manager of the National Nuclear Security Administration's Los Alamos Site Office. "To ensure that the Senate can consider new treaty obligations, NNSA must fulfill its mission to modernize and maintain the Nation's nuclear weapons complex, and replacement of the aging CMR building is a critical component of this mission."

The Los Alamos Study Group in November asked a federal judge for an injunction halting work on CMRR while legal issues regarding environmental analysis of the project. The study group argues that a full Environmental Impact Statement for the project is required under the National Environmental Policy Act, and that all work should be halted while the study is done because of the risk that ongoing work could prejudice a final decision before the review is completed (*NW&M Monitor*, Vol 14 No. 47). The NNSA argues that a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement study now underway is sufficient to meet the requirements of NEPA, and that design work should be allowed to continue in the meantime.

An injunction would cause a lengthy delay because of the difficulty in retaining the contractor staff now working on the project, according to an accompanying affidavit by Herman LeDoux, CMRR-NF's federal project director. According to LeDoux, the architectural and engineering firms involved in the project have been working on design, seismic studies and related work since 2004. For them to halt all work for the estimated eight months needed to complete a new environmental study on the project, the NNSA and Los Alamos would be faced with the decision of continuing to pay their salaries while idled, at an estimated \$1 million per month, or terminating 170 people and losing their specialized expertise. If the work is terminated, it could take another year to re-select contractors before the design work could start up again, LeDoux said. Delays also hurt the lab's ability to do its job, according to Snyder. He alleges in his affidavit that reduced operations in the aging Chemistry and Metallurgy Research building, which CMRR-NF is meant to replace, has left the lab without "important characterization and chemistry capabilities."