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NNSA warhead complex transformation “hearings” begin: Day 1: Socorro Will NM delegation, candidates for Congress speak up?

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

ALBUQUERQUE – The National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) and its contractor Tetra Tech are bringing a series of “hearings” on certain aspects of the future of the nuclear warhead enterprise, including the overall site configuration, to New Mexico. These “hearings” are pursuant to a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process.

These “hearings” are set up to receive citizen input to the NEPA process, but they are not full legal hearings in the ordinary sense of the term (no cross examination, sworn testimony, procedural appeals, judicial involvement, etc.) The ability to vet agency statements through sworn cross examination would be particularly important in this context and it is invariably missing.

NNSA background documents are available at <http://www.nnsa.doe.gov/complextransformation.htm>.

Schedule and locations are here: <http://www.lasg.org/ActionAlerts/ActionAlerts2008.htm#AA84b>.

Some overall background (written for participating citizens) can be found at <http://www.lasg.org/ActionAlerts/ActionAlerts2008.htm#AA84>.

These hearings are centrally about building new warhead factories, especially and pivotally at Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL). The fate of infrastructure investments at LANL, specifically as regards the proposed, perennially-controversial Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement (CMRR) facility, the largest proposed construction project in LANL’s history, are now largely determinative of whether the U.S. builds and deploys a new generation of nuclear warheads.

Background on the proposed \$3+ billion CMRR project complex can be found at http://www.lasg.org/CMRR_2_12_08_ltrhd.pdf.

Its purpose, according to LANL (at <http://www.lanl.gov/orgs/cmrr/>), NNSA, and the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB), is to manufacture the plutonium cores (“pits”) of nuclear weapons. OMB, December 2007: “This facility will be used to manufacture the central core of nuclear weapons, known as the ‘pit.’”

Four years into the 13-year project the final scope of the CMRR has not been decided. Not even the size of the largest building, the CMRR Nuclear Facility (NF), a more than \$2 billion project according to NNSA, has been finalized.

The House of Representatives has tried to deeply cut or kill this project five times in as many years. Each time it has been rescued by Senator Domenici, its primary and possibly only Senate sponsor.

The CMRR is similar in scope and cost to some versions of the previously-proposed Modern Pit Facility (MPF). As in the case of some MPF project approaches, production capacity might be added in phases.

The fate of the CMRR is likely to influence the political success of U.S. nonproliferation efforts. It is already appearing (as a proposed “plant” for controversial new warheads) in the foreign press. (e.g. *Times of India*: “US needs nuclear weapons for rest of century: General,” 5 Mar 2008).

The decision of whether or not to complete the CMRR is unlikely to be made or even influenced directly by these nationwide hearings, but these hearings might influence the NM congressional delegation, which has great power over this project given its history and current controversial status even within the Bush Administration.

As the White House wrote to NNSA late last year in a document leaked to the Study Group, “Currently there is no formal agreement between DOE and DOD on production requirements, and thus no firm basis for setting a facility production capacity requirement. This requirement is the major cost driver for the facility.”

Study Group director Greg Mello: “The key voices missing from this debate are those of the New Mexico congressional delegation. Do they want LANL to host a large manufacturing plant, the functional heir of the disastrous former Rocky Flats Plant, or will they speak, realistically, for different priorities?”

“The U.S. is long past broke. It is difficult to see how the policies which support new factories for weapons of mass destruction (WMD) could ever be compatible with policies emphasizes green jobs, energy security for households, and the “zero net carbon” society we must evolve to keep from gravely damaging the planet. Nuclear weapons, production of different nuclear weapons, and new factories for nuclear weapons, are all vices we cannot afford.

“The proposed ‘diversification’ of LANL into new ‘green’ missions, or attractive, large, cost-effective, rational “homeland security” missions, about which we sometimes hear, is basically a fantasy. Our communities are where investments need to happen to create jobs, energy security, and save the planet. Nuclear labs are money pits and they don’t have the intelligence and wisdom we need. We need an energy “New Deal,” not bureaucratic and pork-barrel investments in technological fantasies that will enrich a few investors and overpaid scientists at the expense of citizens and the planet.”

For background on this subject see http://www.lasg.org/NM_labs_future.pdf.

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