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Bulletin #92

November 17, 2008

Dear colleagues –

1. We are requesting some financial support for our work, at any level whatsoever. You can contribute [here](#).

We don't ask for money all the time. *Now*, however, we are. Some of you have been supporting our work regularly; others have already responded to this fundraising campaign. Thank you! Others have given liberally of your time and attention (and over time, many have done so). Thank you, again.

Sometimes nonprofits seem to offer a bargain that goes something like "Send us money and we will take care of things for you." That's not our intent. Sending a contribution doesn't diminish our responsibility (or opportunity!) to act in the public realm (sorry). We do hope we can give you some tools you can use. Crafting those tools is a two-way street: member engagement helps create and shape what we do.

At this historical moment a great deal is at stake, and solidarity is especially important.

So, if you haven't written us a check recently or used our [secure portal for a credit card or electronic check donation](#), now would be a very good time to do so.

A contribution of any amount whatsoever would be useful. It may not be obvious why even a small contribution would be helpful.

- Breadth of support is important *legally*, should we be able to proceed with intervention in the Kansas City lawsuit mentioned in [Bulletin 91](#), or with other litigation;
- Your support is important *morally* to the staff, board, volunteers, and to our audiences;
- Your support is important *politically* in many ways.
- Finally it is important *financially*, as it can sometimes lead to increased participation by others.

Your contribution – *of whatever size* – is important. Our work, like everything else in society, is the product of shared faith. We are making stone soup, and even a tiny potato will help.

Even five dollars would be helpful. We value your solidarity very much; that five dollars shows it, and almost everyone receiving this email can send that much. Some may wish to send more. *That hypothetical \$5 embodies something like the smallest quantum of concrete political support.*

We don't share our donor or email lists with anyone, by the way.

Contributions to the Los Alamos Study Group are all tax-deductible.

Please call us if you would like to make a donation of stock or other asset, which may have tax advantages in particular cases.

2. There are also other ways you can express your solidarity, some easy, some not. ([back to contents](#))

An organization like the Los Alamos Study Group provides a means for individuals to achieve together what they could not achieve separately. That being said, there is nothing magical about this process. A few minutes work seldom changes history. So we shouldn't bother, right?

No! As Edmund Burke said, "No one could make a greater mistake than he who did nothing because he could do only a little." Quantitative considerations are useful but they can also be confusing. "[D]oes the individual," wrote Carl Jung, "know that *he* is the makeweight that tips the scales?"

Here are some other ways to help:

a. Ask your friends to sign up for our Bulletins, which we hope to send out once per week, on Friday or the weekend. To sign up, send a blank email to [this address](#).

b. Ask your friends to support us financially. *Even a little bit helps*, as discussed above.

Some of you know people who could support our work substantially – support it financially, politically, or both. If you believe in the value of our work, talk to them about it. Most of us do not realize how much social power we have. If we want to save the planet and humanity, or build up New Mexico's economy and polity in the face of general decline, we are going to have to use that power intelligently and firmly. Our society and environment are now in a position something like the Titanic after it struck the iceberg. Let's not waste one another's time.

c. Learn more about the issues yourself, and write. For example, you can write letters to the editor (150 words or less) or longer guest editorials (600 words is usually a good length).

d. Discuss the issues with your friends. Read what we have written; get background from anywhere and everywhere. Caveat emptor, of course. Meet with your friends and think about things together. If you have unresolved questions or if something doesn't seem to make sense, ask one of us or ask us to meet with your group.

e. Go to meetings and speak up. There is precious little public dialogue about key policy issues these days, and much of it is controlled by a very few agenda-setting financial nodes.

f. Make an inventory for yourself of the organizations to which you belong or in which you might have some voice. Issues of nuclear disarmament, environmental protection, social justice, and economic sustainability are all cut from the same cloth. Narrow institutional interests and a lack of political consciousness keep most nonprofits from contributing to the development of broad-spectrum progressive politics. Think about how to help.

There are no cookie-cutter substitutes for genuine political leadership and real political enfranchisement. I am not going to send you Astroturf e-grams asking you to do fruitless things. As we work together in creating a more just and sustainable society we will build the road as we travel.

3. Help halt efforts to build a new nuclear weapons factory in Albuquerque (and Kansas City). ([back to contents](#))

We have written to you (on August [17](#) & [25](#) and [November 7](#)) about the efforts of some organizations and individuals to move the functions of the Kansas City Plant (KCP) to Albuquerque.

Some of our interim conclusions about this issue are summarized [here](#) (pdf) for the use of government actors; these do not include the conclusions we draw for the disarmament and social justice communities.

Meanwhile as you know from [Bulletin #91](#) we hope to intervene in the litigation recently filed by the folks who want to bring the plant to New Mexico. If we petition to intervene, we will do so to protect New Mexico (and its 1st Congressional District) from further major nuclear weapons investments as well as bring some new issues to the court's attention as to why the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) does not need a new KCP in Kansas City either.

If we can afford to join and if are admitted, we will be the only party in this suit opposing a new plant anywhere. Moving KCP to New Mexico would mean building a major new facility or combination of facilities about two-thirds the scale of Intel's Rio Rancho plant in employment and about the size of Cottonwood Mall physically. If built, that factory would be the second or third largest building in New Mexico. We believe it would have an outsize deleterious political effect on our state and a negative effect on nuclear policy nationwide. If the last 40 years are any guide it would make this state poorer while also contributing to the large and growing gap between rich and poor.

The present administration has no interest in moving KCP to Albuquerque but the next one might, even in the face of the very challenging management problems that such a move would unleash. We are working in various ways to forestall that possibility, with what success we do not as yet know.

This is, of course, only one of the proposed New Mexico nuclear weapons factories.

4. Help stop the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement (CMRR) Nuclear Facility (NF). ([back to contents](#))

In a report dated October 17, 2008 the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (DNFSB) [published word](#) (pdf) of yet another major problem in the design of this \$2++ billion (B) project – sort of a “mine shaft gap,” as General Turgidson said to President Muffley and Dr. Strangelove in the film of that name.

It appears that the tunnel once designated for conveying plutonium and/or other special nuclear material from the basement of the existing Plutonium Facility (PF-4) to the proposed CMRR is needed for (plutonium pit) radiography, so space for another tunnel must be found and PF-4 modified accordingly, a non-trivial matter.

This is just the latest issue with the CMRR NF, the budget for which has at least tripled so far. Groundbreaking, and a validated cost estimate, are still about a year and a half away, assuming the project gets that far.

The momentum is significant, unfortunately. The CMRR is now the Swiss Army knife (or maybe the Veg-O-Matic) of plutonium facilities. It does, we are told, everything!

Yet the burgeoning cost and as-yet-unresolved engineering problems related to seismicity and the structure's ambitious design, together with the nation's need for real jobs *in quantity*, jobs that create productive and energy-saving or renewable-energy-producing infrastructure, could doom this project.

The CMRR is an energy-intensive project. Authoritative sources at SUNY Syracuse [have suggested](#) that heavy construction in the U.S. costs about 14 megajoules per dollar. The CMRR will cost, in other words, over 6 million barrels of oil -- almost a million tons. The carbon footprint is staggering as well. This is the largest public works project in the history of New Mexico by a factor of roughly 6, not counting the interstate highways (for which we have not yet found a total cost). It is three times the scale of the Golden Gate Bridge in constant construction dollars -- an enormous project, the justifications for which Congress (or, more precisely, the Senate) has never really vetted. It was Senator Domenici's baby, and it couldn't be questioned in the Senate.

Make no mistake: this is a new nuclear weapons factory, the single most pivotal part of the NNSA's Complex Transformation scheme. The Complex Transformation environmental review process has essentially no bearing on this issue. It has to be opposed clearly and directly, by name. We can halt the CMRR NF, an essential element in NNSA's hopes for a Reliable Replacement Warhead (RRW), but we need your help.

Too many organizations are still hanging on the sidelines. You might call up any organizations you support and ask them to send you their lobbying materials on this issue. Possibly those materials do not even exist. Alas, many nuclear-policy professionals, in DC as well as around the country, don't know the first thing about the giant CMRR project or its central importance in enabling nuclear innovation. Overall, this is an unfortunate byproduct of strategies that would substitute "consolidation" for real disinvestment in nuclear weapons. If the CMRR goes forward, we may well be fighting the "RRW" or some other new weapons program for decades to come. Every "victory" will be temporary.

5. It is time for a big push to cut nuclear weapons spending. ([back to contents](#))

As we said to key congressional actors earlier this year (as in previous years), the nuclear weapons complex is over-funded. (See for example “Letter to Congress re nuclear appropriations,” Parts [I](#) & [II](#) (both pdf), May 13 & 14, 2008; “[Letter to appropriators](#)” (pdf), Dec 3, 2007; or “[Note to Congress re NNSA infrastructure decisions pending](#)” (pdf), Aug 24, 2007).

The House has been inclined to cut budgets (more or less along the lines we have recommended, though not as deeply or broadly), especially at the New Mexico labs and *especially* at Los Alamos. Up to now Senator Domenici has ridden to the labs' rescue, more or less. Next year, if the House cuts these programs again, either someone else must rescue them – or they won't.

It is finally widely understood that the United States is very, very broke. Even a Pentagon business advisory board [is saying](#) major weapons programs must be cut. Under these conditions projects like the CMRR may not be politically or managerially viable (even though it is said to facilitate, with perfect benignity, all things dark and plutonium).

Today's recession has no visible end. Our society will henceforth have gradually fewer fiscal and material resources available. Long-term projects like the CMRR that have weak mission justifications and huge, growing price tags, may well end up as festering fiscal wounds that never heal.

Democrats and arms controllers have not opposed the excessive nuclear weapons budgets that have, since 1995, showered tens of billions of dollars in excess appropriations on the nuclear laboratories and to a lesser extent elsewhere on the weapons complex. A robust (i.e. wasteful, in this case) stockpile stewardship was once seen as the price of Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) ratification. We believe the best path to CTBT ratification lies through lower nuclear weapons budgets, not higher ones, as explained [here](#) (pdf), and that U.S. ratification of the CTBT is now a largely irrelevant goal. The all-but-finished CTBT struggle was a real victory in 1996. It is mostly a distraction in U.S. nuclear politics today.

We can and should move forward with disinvestment in nuclear weapons and not be held back by ten- and fifteen-year-old strategies (CTBT ratification) and tactics (don't oppose lab funding) that have long outlived their usefulness, where there was any.

We want your help to explore these realities in depth with Congress and the Obama Administration, where we have a ready audience.

Thank you for your attention and solidarity,

Greg Mello

Later this week:

Bulletin #93: "Will moving the Kansas City Plant (KCP) to Albuquerque lead us closer to disarmament?"

To subscribe to this listserve, send a blank email to lasg-subscribe@lists.riseup.net.

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