



# Los Alamos Study Group

*Nuclear Disarmament • Environmental Protection • Social Justice • Economic Sustainability*

August 10, 2011

Dear friends and colleagues –

I am writing to ask for your support (and that of your friends if they are so moved) to help us halt a proposed new \$6 billion plutonium warhead production and storage complex at Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL).

At the heart of this complex would lie a single building, deceptively named the “Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement Nuclear Facility” (CMRR-NF). CMRR-NF would be the most expensive government project ever built in New Mexico by about a factor of ten, with the exception of our two interstate highways.

This one plutonium processing and storage bunker would cost, in inflation-corrected dollars, as much as all the construction and operating expenses of Los Alamos from its inception through 1958. It would dwarf, by a factor of five, what the Manhattan Project spent in New Mexico during World War II.

If it proceeds this giant nuclear project would dominate all New Mexico construction for the crucial decade ahead. With other unnecessary nuclear weapons “modernization” projects it would hog resources in the annual Energy and Water appropriations process, crippling the creation of new energy jobs. For New Mexico, it would drive our State in exactly the wrong direction – toward poverty and despair for most.

The 600 temporary jobs it would create (many or most of which would be given to out-of-state nuclear-certified workers and engineers) would cost taxpayers a staggering \$10 million apiece, under the optimistic assumption that costs do not rise further. The estimated cost of this project has already increased by a factor of fifteen. No permanent jobs will be created.

The negative impact of a huge plutonium processing center on real estate markets and housing construction may more than offset any supposed economic “benefit,” outside Los Alamos itself.

The *political* impact is worse. Already the entire New Mexico delegation is four-square behind this boondoggle, even though this giant project (and the new warhead production it implies) would crowd out green energy jobs. Make no mistake: this facility competes directly each year with green jobs, with low-income heating assistance, with wind and solar energy, with energy-saving building renovation – in fact with all peaceful Department of Energy (DOE) programs.

This huge building would do much more than “replace” a half-abandoned old lab at Los Alamos. It would vastly expand plutonium operations at LANL, making Los Alamos into the successor to the former Rocky Flats plutonium plant. Plutonium warhead core (“pit”) manufacture has never been done safely anywhere, at any time.

## TIPPING THE BALANCE

FROM NUCLEAR BOONDOGGLES AND MILITARY WASTE  
TO SUSTAINABLE ENERGY AND SOCIAL RENEWAL

AUG. 25, 6 - 9 PM – SAVE THE DATE!  
SPREAD THE WORD!

Please join the Los Alamos Study Group and friends for an unprecedented and stimulating evening of engagement with some of most critical issues facing New Mexico.

This fundraising and educational event will take place at the lovely Santa Fe home of Tom and Adelma Hnasko, 1239 Upper Canyon Road. Tom is our lead attorney in litigation against the proposed huge new plutonium facility at LANL.

For a map and details see the enclosed invitation. Dress is casual.

Award-winning filmmaker and technology scholar Godfrey Reggio (*Koyaanisqatsi*) will be our keynote speaker, followed by Study Group Director Greg Mello.

Ms. Shigeo Sasamori, who survived the Hiroshima bomb after sustaining terrible burns, and turned this misfortune into a joyful life of service to children here in the U.S., will join her friend Ms. Ali McGraw, actor of stage and screen and author, in co-hosting the event.

Please RSVP by calling or writing Trish at 505-265-1200 or [twm@lasg.org](mailto:twm@lasg.org). The minimum donation will be \$100 per person. Gourmet pizza, salad, and drinks will be served.

*“Does the individual know that (s)he is the makeweight that tips the scales?”* Carl Jung

It is an inherently risky and dirty business.

*We have a very good chance of stopping this fiasco.* The Republican-led House of Representatives has voted against construction next fiscal year for a number of reasons and has proposed cutting \$100 million from its requested appropriation even prior to the recent deficit reduction law. The Senate Armed Services Committee has expressed doubts about the extravagant cost of this facility. The Government Accountability Office also has doubts about the project and is investigating it. This unnecessary project even has opposition within the Executive. Last week's deficit reduction legislation introduced even more uncertainty – as it raises the stakes for what is left of our social contract.

In part through our efforts, this project has been delayed for several years already, most recently for a year while our litigation under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) ran its course. Our case was eventually dismissed, but the steps taken by DOE to defend against us are still preventing construction today. We are appealing this local decision – which we believe was based on faulty law – to the Tenth Circuit in Denver.

*The tide in Congress is turning in our favor but the project's momentum is considerable.* Preliminary construction could begin as soon as October if we are not successful. *We need you to help us tip the balance.*

We are not a NIMBY group. There is just no need for this building to maintain U.S. warheads indefinitely, as President Clinton's technical advisor Dr. Frank von Hippel, and the former Sandia vice president responsible for designing most U.S. nuclear weapons, Robert Peurifoy, have both testified in our litigation. *All the proposed functions of this building are gratuitous, duplicative of existing capabilities, or both.*

This project is nonetheless “unequivocally” supported by President Obama, and nearly all foundation funders do not (yet) oppose it. Many “disarmament” organizations have tried to protect this project since its inception in 1999, as a political necessity for various real and imagined arms control “deals” to be struck with Republicans. *Only this month* are we beginning to see what *may become* the development of significant opposition by nonprofits in Washington.

That's why *your* financial help is so important right now. *Please look over the enclosed materials and respond as generously as you can.* Share them with your friends. You can learn more about us and about this project at [lasg.org](http://lasg.org). We have enclosed a self-addressed envelope for your convenience (add a first-class stamp, please!). You can donate on-line at [lasg.org](http://lasg.org). To make other arrangements call 505-265-1200 or write Trish at [twm@lasg.org](mailto:twm@lasg.org).

*We are experts, we are winners, and we are determined.* *We have successfully fought off variations of this monstrosity for 21 years* amidst our other work. This long struggle has now reached a crucial stage, and we are reaching out farther than before for critically-needed financial and political help.

We are powerful in this fight for two main reasons. First, we are widely respected on Capitol Hill and elsewhere in government. We have a respectful and attentive audience where it most counts. Our ideas have become legislation.

Second, some truths are just too big to hide. *The very crowded mesa on which this bunker would squat lies between powerful, active earthquake faults.* Seismic investigations (ordered in part by a federal judge in Washington as a result of our litigation and testimony in 1997) have revealed that seismic accelerations in Los Alamos can be even greater than those which struck the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant. Worse, LANL would place this behemoth above a weak volcanic ash deposit with little resistance to seismic motion – or else dig out this entire stratum, installing a giant block of concrete 60 feet thick to replace it in a pit some 130 feet deep, to be dug next to operating nuclear facilities.

These and other problems make this project terribly expensive. It would require a vast amount of concrete (371,000 cubic yards) – more than 100 times what was originally envisioned. It would need more steel than the Eiffel Tower. All to buy very little “useful” space: 90% of the building would be for support equipment and the structure itself.

One of those uses is a vault to store 6 metric tons of plutonium, “the nation's storehouse,” enough to re-make the entire strategic stockpile. Oddly, until George W. Bush was elected, a lab housing 900 grams of plutonium was adequate.

Now, the new deficit legislation is forcing a momentous clash between wasteful military spending (including this project) and the socially and environmentally responsible investment we need. *Please fight with us.* There are many ways to do that – contact us for more on that topic – but contributing financial resources is paramount right now.

Deciding not to build this project – as opposed to abandoning it later for lack of money – is very important for New Mexico and the country as a whole. With your help, we can finish turning the tide. Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

Greg Mello, for the  
Los Alamos Study Group