

Asian Scientists Bypass Los Alamos

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WASHINGTON — Wen Ho Lee, the scientist under suspicion for espionage, has become the subject of an Asian-American backlash in the scientific community.

In April, physicists discussed how the tightened security measures in the nation's top research facilities, which are the subject of the backlash in Los Alamos, have decreased morale and are detrimental to the advancement of scientific research. According to one source, "Any impediment to the exchange of ideas serves only to drive away our most productive scientists from the national labs and discourage the recruitment of the next generation of young, gifted scientists."

The Wen Ho Lee case has had a huge impact. Los Alamos laboratory director John Browne has admitted that many of the country's brightest science graduates show no interest in working there. Many of those

graduates are Asian American. According to Browne, Asian-American hires at Los Alamos have dropped dramatically. "This year, when I looked at the results, there were zero — zero Chinese or Chinese-American applicants," Browne said.

More than a dozen Asian-American associations have joined forces to show their support for Wen Ho Lee. Among them are the National Asian-Pacific-American Bar Association, the Chinese Physics Association and the Asian-American Manufacturers Association.

Bill Chang, president of the Chinese-American Engineers, has pledged that his group will "support him (Lee) morally and monetarily." He also stated that many of the group's members have expressed concern about their own situations. "They're very scared and angry. They're really upset about what this means for them," he said.

Victoria Hwang, a lawyer who has previously worked with the Democratic National Committee, likens

Lee's situation to racial profiling. "It's the same thing," she says. "If people think this has upset just the political activists (in the Asian-American community) and not the mainstream of Asian Americans, they're wrong."

Stewart Kwok, The executive director of the Asian-Pacific-American Legal Center of Southern California, has stated that "people are tired of the sense that they are looked at as permanent foreigners."

The problem is complex. If Lee is indeed guilty of espionage, he should pay the penalty, but that is not the issue. What has upset the Asian-American community is that Lee is perceived to have been targeted as a spy for China primarily because he is Asian. The authorities deny this, claiming the case against him is being developed.

But developing cases often take on ominous overtones because charges and resulting trials are delayed, which opens the door for speculation. If, for example, the government has circumstantial evi-

dence against Lee, but it is not strong enough to bring a conviction, no trial will ensue, but Lee would find his employment possibilities severely restricted. Meanwhile, the government would be assailed for condemning and ostracizing without due process. It's a no-win situation.

On the other hand, if there is a trial and a conviction, a portion of the public, as well as government officials, might be inclined to question the loyalty of other Asian-American scientists. This is what is causing the current uproar, because such biases are already appearing.

It was assumed that America learned this lesson when it unconstitutionally interned Japanese Americans during World War II. The nation has now offered compensation and an apology for that error. Are we going to repeat the mistake?