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President

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Academic Affairs

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA 94720

March 16, 1990

Mr. H. L. Daneman
HLD Associates
1304 Calle Ramon
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87501

Dear Mr. Daneman:

President Gardner has asked that I answer your recent letter to him, in which you expressed concern over several matters, including one related to the allegations that plutonium processing would be conducted at Los Alamos. Let me try to respond to some of your concerns:

As you know, Los Alamos is planning to build a new plutonium research facility, the Special Nuclear Materials Research and Development Laboratory, or SNML. The purpose of this facility is not the routine processing of plutonium or parts for nuclear weapons, but rather plutonium research in general. You might logically ask why, after over 40 years of such research more is needed? One of the answers to that question is that all the processes now used for plutonium produce far too much waste, and disposing of this waste is a major problem. Among other topics, Los Alamos intends to do research on processes producing less waste that could be used at other sites such as Rocky Flats. These better processes are needed irrespective of changes in defense policies. Reductions in the number of nuclear weapons, which is very likely to occur, will require processes that treat the plutonium in an environmentally acceptable manner. I have enclosed a fact sheet that describes the building as well as some of the research that will be done in it.

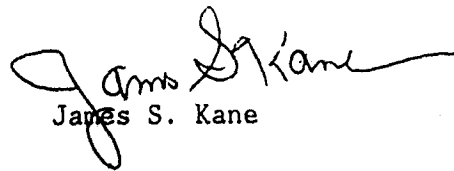
As to the allegations that Los Alamos will become a production site, these are based on the suggestions of a committee of the National Research Council, and do not express the intent of the United States Government. I have enclosed a copy of the National Research Council report. At the time of his February 14 visit to Los Alamos, Secretary of Energy Watkins was asked to comment on the issue of plutonium production at Los Alamos. As you can see from the enclosed clippings, he denied this emphatically, as did Director Hecker. Let me further add that the University has no intention of managing a production facility. Our contract calls for research only.

Another question in your letter concerns the costs that the DOE faces in the environmental cleanup of the weapons complex. I think it is truthful to say today that no one knows what the total costs will be, because the situation

has not yet been thoroughly assessed. This process of assessment is now going on at all the DOE sites. The greatest problems identified so far are at Savannah River, Hanford, Fernald, and Rocky Flats. The Los Alamos Laboratory is now in the process of assessing its environmental problems, almost all of them a result of activities during the Manhattan Project days. I am confident that there will be no situations found there that will be of concern to either the workers at Los Alamos or the surrounding populace.

I hope this information is helpful. Thank you for writing.

Sincerely,



James S. Kane

Enclosures

cc: Senior Vice President Frazer