



Los Alamos Study Group

Nuclear Disarmament • Environmental Protection • Social Justice • Economic Sustainability

Dear friends and colleagues –

May 29, 2007 *Issue update and Invitation*

In New Mexico, nuclear weapons aren't an abstract issue. They affect our economy, environment, politics – even our identity. We have to come to grips with them or they will continue to limit our state's potential.

In our mailing to you earlier this month, I outlined some of the critical nuclear weapons choices before us right now. These choices affect the future of New Mexico as well as the world. Effective ways to influence those choices were suggested (on the green reply card, enclosed again here, and on the "Connect!" sheet in the last mailing, also at lasg.org). And we asked for your financial support.

If you haven't yet had a chance to respond, why not glance over those materials now? Call us if you have any questions – or if you would like a copy for a friend.

Meanwhile I can fill you in on recent congressional action as regards nuclear weapons. Given the urgency of the situation, much of our attention has been focused there for the past few months.

So far, **three committees have failed to approve the Administration's most grandiose nuclear weapons proposals in their entirety.** A fourth has yet to act at all (Senate Appropriations). **The good news:**

- The Reliable Replacement Warhead (RRW) program is wounded. Its proposed budget has been cut by two committees and zeroed out by a third.
- At Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL), the larger of two new plutonium warhead core ("pit") production buildings has suffered delays, cost inflation, and cuts in at least two key committees. This is the so-called Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement (CMRR) "nuclear facility" (NF).
- A Department of Defense (DoD) program to field a dramatically more accurate Trident nuclear missile (with a conventional warhead, *for now*) has been downsized and delayed.

The Study Group has been working with these committees and some individual congresspersons. We have played a small role in the first two of these outcomes. I have been on the ground on Capitol Hill for four full weeks during this budget cycle; Study Group president Peter Neils was there during one of these. We have had dozens of meetings with key decisionmakers not just in Congress but also in executive and congressional agencies. We know our analyses have been used and we know they are in demand in some quarters. Over the coming days we will be responding to requests made during our most recent set of meetings.

We also have been working closely with retired weapons scientists and even some DOE officials, in addition to the "usual suspects." Integrity, like gold, is where you find it.

The bad news is that congressional debate about nuclear weapons issues is sorely limited. The programs actively being questioned by most parties are just a small part of the overall nuclear weapons effort, about 2% of Department of Energy (DOE) programs – or less than 1% if DoD programs are included. The rest pretty much sails on unimpeded.

The bad news:

- Construction of the *other* pit production-related building at LANL (the CMRR "rad lab") continues "full steam ahead," plus related projects also designed to facilitate increased pit production.
- Pit production, halted since 1989 in the U.S., could start up at any time (possibly this year!) at LANL.
- Democrats have not acted decisively to change the Administration's aggressive policies. Those few nuclear programs not fully authorized and funded are likely to be "kicked down the road," ostensibly until a new administration takes over in 2008 but more likely just to avoid the tough decisions, period.

So that's the congressional report, for now. **Where is the New Mexico delegation in all this?**

- **Pete Domenici** is the leading congressional proponent of new nuclear weapons (i.e. the RRW program), of new plutonium pit factories at LANL – and of pretty much everything else nuclear

- **Jeff Bingaman** appears to be keeping up with the issues intellectually but is waiting for “the sense of Congress” to gel so he can ally himself with the majority. He is silent and largely missing in action on nuclear weapons issues. As regards pit production in particular, Bingaman could make a decisive impact if he were to introduce an amendment to halt pit production pending the outcome of studies designed to answer some obvious questions. (Take a look at the 2/24/07 pit production talking points at lasg.org.) He could also halt construction of the new pit factory in a similar way, just by repeating out loud – say, to an investigatory agency – the questions that others in Congress, and we, are asking.
- **Tom Udall** is likewise utterly silent and passive, even though he has “traded up” his committee assignments for a seat on the House Appropriations Committee. He does not appear to keep up with the issues at all, or to care about them, an observation based on many years of our interaction with him and his staff. New Mexico could do much better.
- **Heather Wilson** is keeping a low profile on nuclear weapons. She has taken herself off the House Armed Services Committee and joined the Energy and Commerce Committee. In sharp contrast to Mr. Udall, she met with us for an intelligent (if very hawkish) conversation after a single request.

I’d like to say, “Call your congressperson and Senators!” but the truth is that the New Mexico delegation will not listen to you – neither to you personally nor to a few thousand of you collectively. Not now, and realistically not ever. They will assign an intern to take your call or read your letter, which then will go into the recycling bin. A typical citizen email, especially if standardized, is utterly worthless. So are preprinted postcards. They do listen to money and influence (by which I mostly mean, influence over money). **If you don’t have money or political influence, you can forget about writing or calling the New Mexico delegation.** There are better uses for your time.

What *are* those “better uses of your time” for changing public policy – given that current policies are taking this country, including your family and mine, and this whole planet, over the edge of a precipice? There are thousands of effective actions unique to a person’s skills, preferences, circumstances, and opportunities. We have suggested a few, but you won’t find “cookie-cutter” messages and methods at the Los Alamos Study Group. **What all effective approaches have in common is a deeper commitment, which will bring new skills, relationships, knowledge, and power.** These will empower us if we embrace them. If we change – not just in theory or as a subjective fantasy but in actual fact (and that’s the rub) – the world will also change.

Our experience at the Study Group is that it takes only a very few people to change policy. Less than 10 perhaps, if the quality of their commitment is high. Gandhi used to say that, in the beginning, just one satyagrahi would be enough to liberate India if that person were non-violent enough. Unfortunately, he said, he knew no one like that. In the U.S. we are a mass society, far too much so. Even many progressive activists conceive of themselves and their work in “mass” terms. There is too much talk about large numbers of people, at the core of which is often a settled, tacit belief in personal disempowerment. All efforts predicated on a theory of action involving large numbers of people are failing. Margaret Mead advised the opposite: **“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”** She said a “small group,” not a large one. Perhaps Martin Buber’s admonition is key: **“Do not withhold yourself.”**

So far I’ve been telling you about nuclear weapons issues and the Study Group’s recent work. I’ve asked for your support and welcomed your participation. These vital things being said, I want to say something more. I will say it as simply as I can: **I hope you will consider devoting your whole life to protecting the planet and the beings in it. In the final analysis, that is what it will take** – more whole lives, wholly devoted. Why not work with your friends to organize support for one of you? Time is of the essence, and we won’t have another chance. We need to shake off inaction and act decisively on behalf of those who cannot.

In solidarity,

greg mello

Greg Mello, for the Los Alamos Study Group