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Anti-nuclear Nuclearism

By Darwin BondGraham and Will Parrish. Edited by Miriam Pemberton, January 12, 2009

(Editor's Note: This is part of a strategic dialogue on U.S. nuclear policy. Please also see Russ Wellen's Abdicating U.S. Nonproliferation Leadership and his response to this piece.)

The Obama administration is likely to continue a policy that we call "anti-nuclear nuclearism." Anti-nuclear nuclearism is a foreign and military policy that relies upon overwhelming U.S. power, including the nuclear arsenal, but makes rhetorical and even some substantive commitments to disarmament, however vaguely defined. Anti-nuclear nuclearism thrives as a school of thought in several think tanks that have long influenced foreign policy choices related to global nuclear forces. Even the national nuclear weapons development labs in New Mexico and California have been avid supporters and crafters of of it.

As a policy, anti-nuclear nuclearism is designed to ensure U.S. nuclear and military dominance by rhetorically calling for what has long been derided as a naïve ideal: global nuclear disarmament. Unlike past forms of nuclearism, it de-emphasizes the offensive nature of the U.S. arsenal. Instead of promoting the U.S. stockpile as a strategic deterrence or umbrella for U.S. and allied forces, it prioritizes an aggressive diplomatic and military campaign of nonproliferation. Nonproliferation efforts are aimed entirely at other states, especially non-nuclear nations with suspected weapons programs, or states that can be coerced and attacked under the pretense that they possess nuclear weapons or a development program (e.g. Iraq in 2003).

Effectively pursuing this kind of belligerent nonproliferation regime requires half-steps toward cutting the U.S. arsenal further, and at least rhetorically recommitting the United States to international treaties such as the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). It requires a fig leaf that the United States isn't developing new nuclear weapons, and that it is slowly disarming and de-emphasizing its nuclear arsenal. By these means the United States has tried to avoid the charge of hypocrisy, even though it has designed and built newly modified weapons with qualitatively new capacities over the last decade and a half. Meanwhile, U.S. leaders have allowed for and even promoted a mass proliferation of nuclear energy and material, albeit under the firm control of the nuclear weapons states, with the United States at the top of this pile.

Many disarmament proponents were elated last year when four extremely prominent cold warriors — George P. Shultz, William Perry, Henry Kissinger, and Sam Nunn — announced in a series of op-eds their commitment to "a world free of nuclear weapons." Strange bedfellows indeed for the cause. Yet the fine print of their plan, published by the Hoover Institute and others since then, represents the anti-nuclear nuclearist platform to a tee. It's a conspicuous yet

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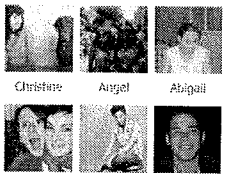

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merely rhetorical commitment to a world without nuclear weapons. These four elder statesmen have said what many U.S. elites have rarely uttered: that abolition is both possible and desirable. However, the anti-nuclear posture in their policy proposal comes to bear only on preventing non-nuclear states from going nuclear, or else preventing international criminal conspiracies from proliferating weapons technologies and nuclear materials for use as instruments of non-state terror. In other words, it's about other people's nuclear weapons, not the 99% of materials and arms possessed by the United States and other established nuclear powers.

This position emphasizes an anti-nuclear politics entirely for what it means for the rest of the world — securing nuclear materials and preventing other states from going nuclear or further developing their existing arsenals. U.S. responsibility to disarm remains in the distant future, unaddressed as a present imperative.

Exclusive Route around the CTBT

Concerns about the nuclear programs of other states — mostly Islamic, East and South Asian nations (i.e., Iran, North Korea, etc.) — conveniently work to reinforce existing power relations embodied in U.S. military supremacy and neocolonial relationships of technological inequality and dependence. By invoking their commitment to a "world free of nuclear weapons," the ideologues behind the anti-nuclear nuclearist platform justify invasions, military strikes, economic sanctions, and perhaps even the use of nuclear weapons themselves against the "rogue states" and "terrorists" whose possession of weapons technologiesvastly less advanced than those perpetually stockpiled by the United States is deemed by the anti-nuclear nuclearists the first and foremost problem of the nuclear age.

Unfortunately the Obama administration is likely to pursue this Orwellian policy of anti-nuclear nuclearism rather than taking a new, saner direction. A strong early indication of this trajectory is his selection of many Clinton administration advisers and officials as national security officials in his Cabinet. The Clinton administration fought hard for the ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) in 1999, which would commit the United States to cease all nuclear explosions. But, in true anti-nuclear nuclearist fashion, it also gave the United States nuclear weapons labs the Stockpile Stewardship Program, by which they could move forward with a massive scientific effort to develop the knowledge and scientific expertise for virtual weapons design and testing via a multi-billion dollar infrastructure of supercomputers, laser, and flash X-ray facilities that brazenly give the United States an exclusive route around the CTBT. Meanwhile, the United States has further violated the spirit of the treaty by detonating an average of 10 so-called "sub-critical" nuclear bombs every year at the Nevada Test Site since 1997: explosions involving as many as 3.3 pounds of plutonium that stop just short of splitting the atom.

Because non-nuclear states aren't able to go nuclear without actual testing, the ostensibly anti-nuclear CTBT would lock in less technologically advanced states into a nuclear status quo. By conducting nuclear tests, the non-nuclear nations would justify sanctions under the treaty and presumably trigger military action by the United States.

Former Secretary of State Madeline Albright said as much in her testimony before Congress in 1999:

Since America has no need and does not plan to conduct nuclear explosive tests, the essence of the debate over the CTBT should be clear. It is not about preventing America from conducting tests; it is about preventing and dissuading others from doing so. It's about establishing the principle on a

global basis that it is not smart, not safe, not right, and not legal to conduct explosive tests in order to develop or modernize nuclear weapons.

The Bush administration has been widely viewed by both former Clinton staff and conservative "realists" such as Brent Scowcroft and Kissinger as having squandered opportunities to enact an anti-nuclear nuclearist regime. By pushing aggressively and publicly for new nuclear weapons programs, George W. Bush lost the necessary perception of moral high ground required for such a strategy to succeed. But then again, the neoconservatives have never believed in the "softer" forms of hegemonic power advocated by the Democrats and previous Republican administrations.

Picking Up Where Clinton Left Off

Obama's administration will inevitably pick up where the Clinton administration left off. Senate Republicans voted down the CTBT in 1999. The Stockpile Stewardship program moved ahead smoothly but is incapable of serving as an effective program for designing the new generation of nuclear weapons envisioned by the U.S. nuclear establishment. Thus, the next stage of the new nuclear imperialism is now being enacted: the Reliable Replacement Warhead (RRW) program, an effort to develop new nuclear arms and reinvigorate the nuclear weapons complex under the rubric of "replacing" existing nuclear warheads.

Over the next four years, we're likely to see an increasing commitment to international treaties like the NPT and CTBT on the part of the United States. The Strategic Offensive Reduction Treaty's (SORT) goal of reducing the U.S. strategic force to 1,700-2,200 operational weapons is likely to be achieved and made permanent, thereby creating a false veneer of U.S. intention to disarm. Further cuts might proceed. Most assuredly we'll witness incredibly aggressive efforts to stop proliferation of nuclear technology aimed at Iran, North Korea, and beyond, involving the use of diplomacy, force, economic coercion, sabotage, proxy attacks, political destabilization, and more.

What's harder to predict is the fate of the RRW program. On the surface, antinuclear nuclearism is incompatible with new weapons development, and RRW is most certainly a new weapon, no matter what Los Alamos, Lawrence Livermore, and Sandia National Laboratory scientists and administrators claim. But herein lies the unknown. It's possible that the RRW will get the go-ahead eventually. Just as the Clinton White House relented and gave the weapons labs the Stockpile Stewardship Program, partly as a political pay-off to ensure they wouldn't obstruct the CTBT's ratification, so might the Obama administration ratify the new program now so strongly desired by the nuclear weapons complex, so as to secure room for U.S. officials to pursue their nonproliferation efforts at the international level.

Not coincidentally, technological advancements under the Stockpile Stewardship program enable U.S. development of the RRW without the politically taboo need for nuclear testing, as Robert Gates — Bush's Defense Secretary and now Obama's — noted in a November 3 speech before the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Gates, of course, was simply referring to an outcome that that Clinton's Energy and Defense departments sought from day one: the ability to develop and test nuclear weapons using the new virtual weapons development infrastructureat the weapons labs, all without violating the letter of the CTBT. Thus, U.S. status as the world's leading nuclear hegemon is ensured.

For any of this to happen, the RRW, or the RRW by another name, will have to be significantly repackaged and re-sold to the U.S. public and international community so that it appears as a design intended to reduce U.S. dependence on

nuclear weapons and facilitate large cuts in the stockpile, alongside a downsizing of the weapons complex. Leading nuclear weapons scientists, military leadership, and U.S. nuclear officials are calling the RRW "not a new weapon," and uttering assurances that its purpose is to facilitate reductions in the U.S. nuclear arsenal. That it would give the United States nuclear weapons complex a new lease on life into the distant future, cost untold billions of dollars, re-establish plutonium pit production in the United States, and hand over a brand-new weapon design to the military are all rhetorically de-emphasized by the program's proponents.

Then again, this may all be a worst-case scenario. Perhaps the Obama administration will undertake a more visionary and just campaign to eliminate nuclear weapons? The incoming president could reintroduce the CTBT, nix the RRW and any new weapons designs, cut the nuclear weapons budget in half, stop construction of the plutonium bomb pit factory in New Mexico, close one of the weapons labs, and downsize the entire nuclear weapons complex. Obama could dismantle the profit-driven system of contracts that have made such powerful lobbying interests out of firms with government nuclear contracts. His administration could enjoin talks toward implementing Article VI of the NPT. He could go against the explicitly pro-nuclear power Energy secretary he appointed and enact a ban on new nuclear power development. Continuinity of the status quo, however, is altogether more likely. Hope and change, as this election showed, are possible, but only if those who desire it unconditionally demand it.

Darwin BondGraham is a sociologist who lives and works in New Orleans. Will Parrish is an anti-imperialist organizer and scholar living in northern California. They are coauthoring Atomic Trust: the University of California, Nuclear Weapons, and the Pentagon of Power, a book about nuclearism and academia, and are both Foreign Policy In Focus contributors.

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FEDS PONDER SWITCHING LABS TO MILITARY AGENCY

BYLINE: SUE VORENBERG

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Bingaman opposes move from Department of Energy

By Sue Vorenberg

The New Mexican

Sometimes, divorce is a better solution than an ill-advised marriage, said C. Paul Robinson, former director of Sandia National Laboratories.

For years as lab director, Robinson supported the idea of keeping the nation's nuclear weapons labs and programs under the umbrella of the Department of Energy. But after he retired in early 2006, he began to re-evaluate the situation, he said.

As he told members of the House Armed Services Committee's Strategic Forces Subcommittee last summer, he thinks it's time for Sandia, Los Alamos and Lawrence Livermore national laboratories, along with all other nuclear weapons facilities and programs, to be transferred to the Department of Defense.

And a new memo from the Office of Management and Budget directing the departments of Energy and Defense and the National Nuclear Security Administration to look into the idea is certainly a step in the right direction, Robinson said.

"After years of resisting any suggestion to put the weapons program under Pentagon control, I now think the Department of Defense should take the whole nuclear weapons program," Robinson told The New Mexican on Wednesday.

The memo, obtained by The New Mexican, instructs the two departments and NNSA to "assess the costs and benefits of transferring budget and management of NNSA or its components to DOD and elsewhere, as appropriate, beginning in FY 2011."

It also requests a final report be submitted to the Office of Management and Budget by Sept. 30, 2009.

To Robinson, the idea makes a lot of sense, because the weapons program was sort of shoe-horned into the Department of Energy when the agency was created in the 1970s, he said.

Since then, the program hasn't aligned very well into DOE, and perhaps it's time for a change, he said.

"The combination hasn't worked well for either one (nuclear weapons programs or the DOE)," Robinson said. "It hasn't

been a good marriage."

Talk of switching nuclear weapons programs from various agencies has been debated since 1946, said Sen. Jeff Bingaman, a New Mexico Democrat.

In his mind, the last place nuclear weapons programs belong is under the control of the Defense Department, Bingaman said. "I think it's a bad suggestion and one I strongly oppose," he said. "The initial concern is that we should have a separate system for nuclear weapons than we do for conventional weapons, because nuclear weapons are different and much more deadly."

Also, under the Department of Energy, national labs have been able to recruit scientific and technical talent that would be much harder to get if the labs were under military control, he said.

"We have been able, through the management of these weapons in a civilian agency, to attract high-caliber scientists and engineers," Bingaman said. "I think it's harder to do that in a defense agency."

The shift could also hurt New Mexico's economy, because the labs' missions would likely become less broadly focused, Bingaman said. "I think there'd be a lot less technology spin-off because there'd be a lot less nonweapons work," he said.

Still, Robinson said, the move would make a lot of sense from a structural standpoint. With the Obama administration's push toward alternative energy development, and the nation's energy problems as a whole, the Department of Energy has more than enough work to keep itself busy, he said.

"There's far too much work to be done even if you concentrate your energies just on energy," Robinson said.

Nuclear weapons programs, on the other hand, seem to have been a bit of a distraction at DOE, and they haven't been handled very well by NNSA, he said.

"NNSA has focused on optimizing security and safety, and they think that's enough," Robinson said. "There is a wonderful postulate that it's impossible to optimize a total system by concentrating on optimizing its sub-systems. I believe the right answer is to align the whole mission."

Other issues, like communications between agencies on how nuclear weapons are transported and on how weapons are managed, haven't taken priority at DOE, he said.

"The missions do need to be aligned, because nuclear weapons have been so far outside of DOD, and there's been so much distance between the two that they've become disconnected," Robinson said.

Greg Mello, executive director of the **Los Alamos Study Group**, a watchdog organization, agrees with Bingaman that nuclear weapons should be handled differently from other weapons. He said he's concerned that a switch from Energy to Defense would lead to less scrutiny overall on nuclear weapons management and development.

"With the present level of militarization in our society and the enormous secrecy and lack of oversight at the Pentagon, we would have great reservations about putting the nuclear weapons program there," Mello said.

Officials at the labs declined to comment on a possible switch, since the decision would be made at a higher government level.

"This is a communication between OMB and DOE," said Kevin Roark, a **Los Alamos** spokesman.

But some inside the lab have anonymously voiced support for the idea.

Most of those who made comments at the Web site lanl-the-rest-of-the-story.blogspot.com have made positive remarks

about switching control of the labs to the Defense Department, said Frank Young, who runs the popular site focused on issues at Los Alamos National Laboratory.

"I think it's a great idea," said Young, who served in the military and worked at Los Alamos. "Compared to the way I was treated in DOD, DOE was just horrible. There's a culture in the military -- you take care of your people, or your career is over."

If the labs were to switch from Energy to Defense, it's possible that those with health claims from working with nuclear and other materials could get care at Veterans Affairs hospitals, rather than spending their time fighting with the Department of Energy, Young added.

And concerns that a switch would hurt New Mexico's economy also might not be well-founded, Robinson said.

As DOE labs, LANL, Sandia and Livermore all work on projects from other agencies such as Defense and Homeland Security. If control were transferred to Defense, the labs would still be able to work on projects for the Department of Energy or other agencies, Robinson said.

"You can still have multi-agency labs," Robinson said. "There may be some belt-tightening, but that's happening now."

If a switch were made, some language in the contracts to operate nuclear weapons labs and facilities would probably have to change, but Robinson thinks the government-owned, contractor-operated model should remain, Robinson added.

"I think doing this would give the (nuclear weapons) mission the right emphasis," Robinson said.

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LANL TIMELINE

1943-1947: Manhattan Engineering District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers creates and oversees Los Alamos Laboratory.

1947-1975: Atomic Energy Commission oversees Los Alamos Scientific Laboratory.

1975-1977: Energy Research and Development Administration oversees Los Alamos National Laboratory.

1977-present: Department of Energy oversees LANL.

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SANTA FE NEW MEXICAN.com

Stimulus likely to fund LANL cleanup

Funds could translate into hundreds of jobs in Northern New Mexico

By Sue Vorenberg | The New Mexican

2/12/2009

New funding for an old mess could mean hundreds of jobs for Northern New Mexico in this ailing economy.

About $6 billion in funds for defense-related environmental cleanups made it into the final version of the economic stimulus bill that now awaits final Congressional approval.

Some of that money will likely go to New Mexico's national laboratories for projects to clean up legacy waste — which is nuclear and hazardous waste created during and after the Manhattan Project in the 1940s.

And that could greatly help Northern New Mexico, said U.S. Sen. Jeff Bingaman, a Silver City Democrat.

"This bill contains significant funding for environmental cleanup, some of which will undoubtedly be directed to Los Alamos National Laboratory," Bingaman said.

Those funds won't just help the environment, they could also create hundreds of jobs in the Los Alamos area, said Jude McCartin, a spokeswoman for Bingaman.

"This is good news," McCartin said. "It takes care of some long-standing issues and also creates good jobs."

The lab has several "sizable" shovel-ready proposals it submitted to the National Nuclear Security Administration as details of the stimulus package were being put together, said Kevin Roark, a lab spokesman.

When asked how much is needed for either the projects in the stimulus package or in total for cleanup at the lab, Roark said, "I can't be specific about the money."

He added that details, at least for stimulus project funding, should be available sometime after the bill passes.

If projects submitted by the lab are chosen by NNSA, then decontamination, demolition of old waste sites and other work could lead to "several hundred jobs" in the area, he said.

"These jobs would be boots on the ground," Roark said.

Still, Greg Mello, executive director of the Los Alamos Study Group, a watchdog organization, said he isn't convinced that whatever funds make it for cleanup in New Mexico will be sufficient to make any real progress in cleaning up waste at the lab.

Total costs for cleanup at the lab could be "in the low billions," Mello said. "You could spend all the cleanup money from that package at Los Alamos."

He's also concerned that if cleanup activities are done too quickly, some contamination could be missed and later ignored by the Department of Energy, Mello said.

"There's lots of transuranic and mixed waste there, of unknown character, in shallow unlined pits," Mello said. "If one wanted to make that waste stable and inaccessible to human and biological intrusion, it's going to cost some money."

But, that said, he does find it hopeful that the government is paying more attention to cleanup activities in general.

"There's paralysis at the Department of Energy, and this might be a hopeful sign," Mello said.

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SANTA FE NEW MEXICAN.com

Ed Grothus, 1923-2009: Activist used humor to raise awareness

Los Alamos fixture and Black Hole owner dies at 85

By Sue Vorenberg | The New Mexican

2/13/2009

Photo by: New Mexico file photo

You could say Ed Grothus was a man of many stories.

Whether you agreed with him or not, the Los Alamos anti-nuclear activist and owner of the Black Hole was a likable guy who was always quick to use his sense of humor as a way of engaging those around him, community members said.

Grothus died Tuesday after a prolonged battle with colon cancer. He was 85.

"I only met him in person once, but it was impossible not to like the guy," said Frank Young, who runs a popular blog about Los Alamos National Laboratory called lanl-the-rest-of-the-story.blogspot.com.

Young stopped by Grothus' store a few years ago, and was treated to a warm welcome and in-depth tour of the Black Hole, which resells computers, lab equipment and other old junk no longer used at LANL, he said.

One of the things that struck him right away was Grothus' sense of humor, Young said.

"You had to meet him to realize he wasn't serious," Young said. "He talked about holding 'critical Mass' at the church."

Grothus was also a bit of a notorious prankster, a habit that got him in trouble with the authorities more than once, said his daughter Barbara Grothus.

One of the more famous stories is when Grothus sent cans of "Organic Plutonium" to President Bill Clinton and Vice President Al Gore, she said.

Her father replaced the label on an ordinary can with a fake label for Organic Plutonium designed by a Santa Fe artist, then sent them to the White House, Grothus said.

"That got the attention of the Secret Service, who came to pay him a visit," Grothus said. "When they came they called me and asked me if I would vouch for my dad."

Grothus also kept a "Top Secret" stamp in his store, which he used on various disks that he picked up at yard sales, a habit that also got him in trouble, his daughter said.

"He got a little visit from the FBI for that one," Grothus said.

Although he's probably best known for his anti-nuclear musings and for running his store, Grothus also had a lengthy history in the town of Los Alamos.

Grothus was born on June 28, 1923 in Clinton, Iowa. He grew up in the state and graduated from the University of Iowa, then went to work as a machinist in Los Alamos in 1949, not long after the Manhattan Project.

He worked in the lab's R-Site, where his job was to help make "better" atomic bombs, his daughter said.

But by 1968, he had changed his tune and become an anti-war activist. He left the lab in 1969 because he had become so opposed to the nuclear work done there, she said.

As a man who always had several projects going at once, though, Grothus was able to settle into his business, the Los Alamos Sales Company, which he formed in 1951 to buy and resell "things" — mostly surplus equipment from the lab.

That company later became known as the Black Hole because "everything went in, and not even light could get out," an obit written by the family said.

Grothus also kept himself busy writing countless letters to the editor to various newspapers, and he was featured in several stories in magazines and newspapers because of his activism.

In 2006, he got a Lifetime Achievement Award at the Indigenous World Uranium Summit for his work to promote a nuclear-free future.

He also was an integral part of the Los Alamos community, and somebody it was pretty much impossible not to know if you lived there, said Susan Musgrave, former president of Community Bank's Los Alamos branch.

"He was a valued member of the community, always very outspoken and he never wavered in his position," Musgrave said. "You might not have agreed with him, but you always respected him."

Greg Mello, executive director of the Los Alamos Study Group, an anti-nuclear organization, said Grothus' sense of humor and history in the town helped him get his message out in a way that was not overly offensive.

"It gave him a way to speak within the context of Los Alamos that would otherwise have been too tense for anybody to handle," Mello said. "Whenever I would see Ed, he'd say 'Greg, we're not reaching them all yet. How can we reach them better?' Ed was always working to get his point across."

Grothus was diagnosed with cancer several years ago, and while he did have a few surgeries to slow the progression of the disease, he never did chemotherapy or took Western medicine for the problem, his daughter said.

"He didn't like doctors and he didn't want anything to do with Western medicine at all," she said.

But he also wasn't one to dwell on the illness, she added.

"When he was dying he was making jokes up to the end," Grothus said. "He didn't think dying was very interesting. He thought it was boring."

Grothus is survived by his wife of 57 years, Margaret, their children, Barbara Grothus, Tom Grothus, Susan Burns and Mike Grothus, and grandchildren Casey and Michelle Grothus.

Friends can visit DeVargas Funeral Home at 623 Railroad Ave. in Española from 1-5 p.m. on Sunday for an informal memorial. Following that, there will be a private interment at Guaje Pines Cemetery.

A formal memorial service will be announced at a later date, the family said.

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FRANCES HOGAN/Courtesy

END OF AN ERA Los Alamos legend Ed Grothus died of cancer at home on Thursday.

Community icon dies

CAROL A. CLARK
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Managing Editor

Unstoppable in his quest for peace, longtime Los Alamos crusader Ed Grothus lost his battle with cancer.

He died quietly about noon Thursday in his Los Alamos home surrounded by family.

"When one is legendary, one must do legendary things," Grothus often said. And so he did.

One only need Google his name to find him the subject of a trove of newspaper stories and magazine articles from around the world. Grothus, 85, also is the subject of several documentaries and a video that streams on YouTube.

"Ed Grothus was one of a kind," said Executive Director Greg Mello of the Los Alamos Study Group. "His passing leaves a unique void in the broader Los Alamos community. More than most, Ed was irreplaceable. He goes now to join his predecessors in the community of souls who have fought indefatigably for humanity's survival in the nuclear age."

Mello described Grothus as "easy to underestimate."

"The man I knew grew every year, his messages gradually simpler, honing in toward humanity's common and unchanging moral storehouse," Mello said. "He crafted a persona that gave him freedom to act, playing the fool to say serious things that his beloved community might otherwise forget. He enriched a wide audience, helping all of us in the nuclear drama to 'remember our humanity,' as the Einstein-Russell manifesto put it - Who will do that now?"

Los Alamos National Laboratory spokesman Jeff Berger spoke of Grothus during an interview this morning.

"Ed Grothus was a spirited person and outspoken and his outspokenness sometimes was directed at the lab," Berger said. "But I think everyone can ad-

See **ICON**, *2*

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mire the fact that he was engaged and engaging and we send our condolences to his family and friends."

Grothus arrived in Los Alamos in 1949. He often described his work at Los Alamos National Laboratory as "making better bombs."

After he retired in 1969, Grothus increased his anti-nuclear activities and opened The Black Hole at 4015 Arkansas Ave.

People came from all over the world to meet him and see his unusual establishment overflowing with laboratory surplus equipment, peace sayings and anti-nuke slogans.

"Welcome to the black hole museum of nuclear waste," Grothus said to visitors.

Mello said that the artifacts Grothus collected from the past and the obelisks he wished to project into the future, together seemed to comprise an instrument in which the nuclear conscience could be caught and held against forgetting – held long enough, he hoped, by the products of human craft that he loved, to be healed.

"He wanted us to pause and to look into the broken and cast-off tools of science and find a mirror there in which we could see its brokenness and our own – the beginning, perhaps, of wisdom," Mello said. "His death leaves a great void in the world."

Grothus became interesting to writers and film makers as word of his activism and his activities at The Black Hole grew.

Through his frequent letters to the editor and to anyone who would listen, Grothus spoke out against nuclear weapons and the war.

"One bomb is too many," he would say. He quietly protested the bombing of Nagasaki and Hiroshima each year at Ashley Pond.

He spent the last couple of years focused on the creation of twin obelisks, he called the Doomsday Stones or Rosetta Stones for the Nuclear Age.

He commissioned the thick granite pillars topped with large globes from a company in China. They cost some $200,000 to manufacture and ship to him.

The 40-ton, 42-foot tall monuments remain in containers at The Black Hole because he wasn't able to obtain permission to erect them in the county.

The family hopes to realize his dream of placing them in Los Alamos. They also are talking with a nearby Pueblo that has expressed an interest, she said.

Grothus told people his obelisks were not to celebrate the bomb but to make note of the most important man-caused event in the history of the world.

The inscription on the monuments is translated into 15 languages:

"Welcome to Los Alamos, New Mexico, the United States of America, the city of fire. Our fires are brighter than a thousand suns. It was once believed that only God could destroy the world, but scientists working in Los Alamos first harnessed the power of the atom. The power released through fission and fusion gives many men the ability to commence the destruction of all life on Earth ... nuclear bombs cannot be used rationally and dreams for safe and useful nuclear power may never be realized. It is only in Los Alamos that the potentials for unimagined, fantastic good and demonstrated, horrendous evil are proximate."

Grothus was known for wearing a wide variety of bolo ties, many adorned with large turquoise stones, others with DOE medals. Some 20 or more hung on the bed post near where he lay dying.

When certain people came to see him in his final days, Grothus would motion toward the bolos and his daughter Barbara would say, "he wants you to have one."

Grothus and his wife Margaret were married for 57 years. Together they had five children. Their youngest son, Ted, died in a motorcycle accident in 1976.

The Black Hole will remain open for the foreseeable future, Barbara said.

The family intends to hold a number of large sales to thin out some of the inventory.

"It's going to take time," Barbara said, adding she isn't sure what the family will ultimately do about the business.

Friends are invited to a viewing from 1-5 p.m. Sunday at DeVargas Funeral Home at 623 N. Railroad Ave., in Española. There will be a private interment at Guaje Pines Cemetery. A public memorial service will be announced at a later date.

Ed Grothus

Activist Worked for LANL

Store a Tour Of Atomic History

By Raam Wong
Journal Staff Writer

Ed Grothus, an anti-nuclear weapons activist whose overflowing Los Alamos surplus store was a wonderland for amateur inventors, died Thursday. He was 86.

Grothus had cancer and died in his Los Alamos home surrounded by family, according to his daughter, Barbara.

Throughout his life, Grothus battled to get a hand on thousands of Geiger counters, circuit boards, and other gizmos and widgets that he collected from Los Alamos National Laboratory over more than a half-century and had piled high inside his store.

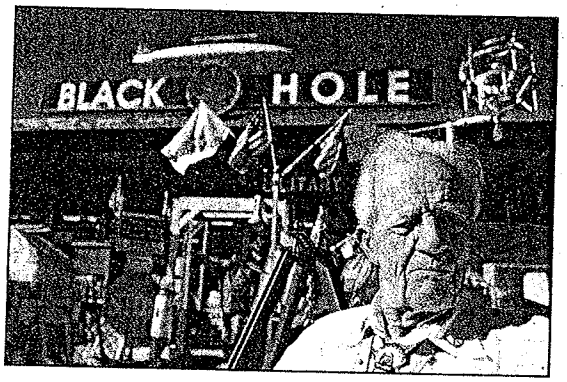
But even as neighbors grumbled and county inspectors shook their heads, the piles continued to grow inside the Black Hole, where it's said everything goes in, but nothing comes out.

"He left work undone, and he was sorry about that," Barbara Grothus said. "He didn't want those things to be a burden to the family."

The family plans to keep the store open for now and hopes one day to open the old church nearby, purchased by Grothus years back, as a museum displaying his collection of artifacts from the Atomic Age.

It was there, at the First Church of High Technology, where Grothus made himself "cardinal," preaching peace and nuclear abolition.

With a dry wit and an unrelenting opposition to nuclear weapons, Grothus was a celebrated eccentric across the globe and hero to peace activists.



JOURNAL FILE

Ed Grothus sold surplus inventory from Los Alamos National Laboratory at his landmark Black Hole. The anti-nuclear activist died Thursday at age 86.

"He found a way to effectively protest nuclear weapons from within the very heart of the nuclear weapons Establishment," said Greg Mello of the Los Alamos Study Group, which opposes nuclear weapons.

Grothus was born on June 28, 1923, in Clinton, Iowa. He served in the Merchant Marine before joining the fledgling federal lab at Los Alamos on March 26, 1949, four years after the atomic weaponry invented there ended World War II.

A child of the Depression, Grothus established the Los Alamos Sales Co. in 1951 to buy and resell surplus lab equipment. He worked for 20 years at LANL, first as a machinist and then in a weapons group, before the Vietnam War turned him against nuclear weapons.

"He was a very smart man who, I think, found his calling after he left the laboratory," his daughter said.

Grothus' company operated for many years as a catalog business, selling to universities worldwide. He typed and mimeographed pages, and his kids helped pack and ship. As the Black Hole became more famous, the shop drew artists, inventors and film set decorators who hauled away X-ray machines, oscilloscopes and odd shapes in metal, rubber and plastic.

Grothus was the subject of two documentaries, including "Atomic Ed and the Black Hole," broadcast on HBO.

But federal authorities never warmed to his antics, like the time he sent "organic plutonium" to the White House, Secret Service agents visited his shop more than once.

To follow Grothus on one of his aimless tours of the Black Hole was to stumble through more than 60 years of atomic history.

"I make a business of selling last year's scientific equipment and hardware," Grothus said in his final Journal interview in November. He wore a puff of unruly white hair and his trademark purple camouflage pants and 5-inch bolo tie. "I only sell about 5 percent of what I buy, so I've built a huge pile over 50 years."

His artwork, fanciful and apocalyptic, filled the store, such as an enormous sunflower formed out of 500-pound test-bomb casings. He kept his most valuable artifacts — like heavy mechanical calculators and a radio said to be owned by Robert Oppenheimer — stashed inside a trailer for the museum he always talked of opening.

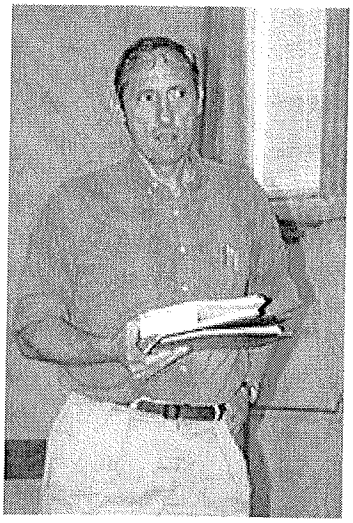
His most prized possession in recent years seemed to be a testament to his credo of "always build, never destroy."

He paid $200,000 to create a massive granite monument marking the first nuclear bomb explosion as a reminder of the nuclear threat posed to humanity. Grothus stored the two towering obelisks inside their original shipping containers as he worked until the very end to find them a home.

Sitting in a lawn chair as he soaked up the sun in front of the Black Hole last year, Grothus smiled wryly when asked about his legacy.

"There's always one man who makes a difference," he said. "Jesus Christ. Josef Stalin. Chairman Mao. Abraham Lincoln. And Ed Grothus."

The family invites friends to visit DeVargas Funeral Home, 623 N. Railroad Ave. in Española, from 1 to 5 p.m. Sunday. A memorial service will be announced at a later date.



Greg Mello of Los Alamos Study Group opposes Pentagon control of the national laboratories.

Lose Nukes

Is Obama trying to neuter LANL?

By: Corey Pein 02/18/2009

President Obama ran for office promising big cuts to nuclear weapons programs. So why has his administration, fresh out of the gate, proposed giving control of those programs to Defense Secretary Robert Gates, who wants to build new nukes?

It's one question raised last week by an Albuquerque Journal article, which revealed the administration might transfer oversight of nuclear weapons from the Department of Energy to the Pentagon.

To former DOE official Robert Alvarez, the proposal raises "one of the big ironies" of the post-Cold War period. "Civilian control over the nuclear weapons program has become an impediment to getting rid of the weapons," Alvarez tells SFR. "If you ask the military guys about nuclear weapons, they really don't hold them as having much value anymore."

Nukes are "a pain in the neck, basically. They would rather buy new tanks and airplanes," Robert Norris, an arms control expert with the National Resources Defense Council, says. "I don't see any

dark conspiracies here that this is some sort of stalking horse to revive the nuclear mission. It's the military itself that has been getting rid of them."

If the nation's nuclear labs moved to the Pentagon, as Alvarez advocated in a Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists article last month, "they would become small fish in a big pond. And that is a very threatening thing, because then they lose their privileged status," Alvarez says.

That may be just the idea. Greg Mello, director of independent Los Alamos Study Group, says the proposal fits with a long-term plan by some disarmament advocates to collapse the nuclear weapons programs as much as possible into New Mexico, thus limiting congressional resistance to weapons cuts. Mello opposes the move. "There is a risk of creating a citadel," he says. "If we're not careful, we can move to a whole 'nother level of military occupation."

In any event, with what looks like a bureaucratic shuffle aimed at saving money, Obama may be taking steps toward dismantling the nation's **$52-billion**-a-year nuclear weapons complex.

Unfortunately, what's good for world peace could be bad for New Mexico.

Minus the high-paying jobs at Los Alamos National Laboratory, northern New Mexico "would be mighty poor," Alvarez says. "You have a great amount of pressure on congressional delegations to maintain the status quo."
That was evident in the response of New Mexico's US senators and representatives to last week's news.

"It's not going to happen," Jude McCartin, spokesperson for Democratic US Sen. Jeff Bingaman, says of a transfer of the labs to the Pentagon. "You can study the issue, but you can't get it done without congressional approval. Sen. Bingaman is adamant" in opposing the move, "and he is not alone."

US Rep. Ben Ray Luján, a Democrat, said in a statement that military control would be "shortsighted and harmful," because it could endanger LANL's renewable energy programs.

Jay Coghlan, director of Nuke Watch New Mexico, agrees that Pentagon control might stifle LANL's efforts to diversify beyond nuclear weapons.

"I think that it would hurt the laboratory," Coghlan says.

He predicts LANL would split in two under Pentagon control, with the military taking charge of nuclear weapons and any "eco/green-friendly/whatever programs" remaining under the DOE.

Problem is, LANL would have to compete for federal renewable-energy funds with other institutions, and "I'm deeply skeptical that Los Alamos could be competitive," Coghlan says.

But Norris says the labs are likely to face cuts even if they remain under the DOE. "There's nothing on the horizon to revive them to even a shadow of what they were. That's the new reality," he says.

And Norris has little patience for the labs' worrywart scientists and managers. "All they do is gripe," he says. "To throw [nuclear weapons researchers] into the Pentagon under some assistant secretary of defense for blah-blah, that would really throw them into a tizzy."

MONITOR
NUCLEAR WEAPONS & MATERIALS

U.S. National Nuclear Security Administration ◆ Russian Ministry of Atomic Energy
...*plus* International Nonproliferation Initiatives *(State, DoD, G-8, IAEA)* ◆ Uranium Enrichment

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— *INSIDE HIGHLIGHTS* —

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be able to provide the analysis and understanding of what we find out and to help the United States' foreign policies."

—Todd Jacobson

NNSA WEAPONS FUNDING BECAME LATE TARGET IN STIMULUS BILL

In the end, it came down to perception, Capitol Hill staffers say. Funding for the National Nuclear Security Administration's weapons program that was stripped from the massive economic stimulus bill signed by President Barack Obama last week may have been planned for relatively innocuous job-creating projects like maintenance, energy projects and facility disposition, but in the days before the chambers came to an agreement on the $787 billion bill, the NNSA money had become a $1 billion target. And by the time House and Senate leaders emerged from conference negotiations, the funding was gone from the bill. "I guess there's a politically correct investment strategy and this wasn't part of it," one Hill staffer told *NW&M Monitor*.

No Amendments, Just Opposition

In the days leading up to the conference negotiations, opposition to the NNSA funding in the stimulus bill had begun to percolate. The Senate had included $1 billion for the NNSA in its version of the stimulus bill; the House had not. Anti-nuclear groups had seized upon the funding, with Ploughshares Fund President Joe Cirincione calling it a "stealth increase in the weapons budget" that would only "stimulate an arms race." Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) cited the funding among a long list of "questionable funding" priorities during a floor speech a day before the Senate passed its version of the bill, and Rep. Ed Markey (D-Mass.) called for the removal of the funding in a Feb. 11 letter to Appropriations Committee Chairman Dave Obey (D-Wisc.).

But there were no amendments filed to cut the money from the bill, just surprise among staffers involved when the final bill emerged from conference with the words "The conference agreement does not provide $1,000,000,000 for the National Nuclear Security Administration, Weapons Activities, as proposed by the Senate." The move caught staffers on both sides of the aisle off guard. "The word is that the leadership on both sides didn't want anything that looked like weapons funding in the bill," another Hill staffer told *NW&M Monitor*. "It didn't matter the merits, how many jobs would be created, or even the environmental benefits. They didn't want anything that said 'weapons funding.' " Staffers also said the Administration voiced its opposition against the NNSA funding during final negotiations on the bill, urging it to be cut.

Funding Targets Vague

The NNSA had been quiet about its plans for the money, saying nothing publicly about how many jobs it might help create or how much it might save the agency down the road in decreased hotel costs. Wording in the Senate version of the bill was deliberately vague due to concerns about earmarks. According to the report accompanying the bill, $900 million was to go toward "maintenance and general plant project backlogs, other construction activities, and various energy projects," and an additional $100 million was directed toward advanced computing research and development.

Watchdog groups worried about providing an infusion of money for the agency's weapons program with the fate of the agency's Complex Transformation plans up in the air, while some anti-nuclear groups cautioned that the money could be used on potentially controversial modernization of weapons-critical projects—or at least to free up money to be used for those programs. "Spending money on defense is in general a poor stimulus for the economy and won't generate as many jobs as spending that money outside NNSA would," Greg Mello, Executive Director of the Los Alamos Study Group, told *NW&M Monitor* earlier this month. "So there's not a strong stimulus impact from this and I would rather have NNSA take care of its general plant projects and D&D through the normal budget process and not try to make headroom in its budget opportunistically because we have an economic crisis."

Spending on the military was found to be a poor stimulus in a 2007 study by the University of Massachusetts-Amherst's Political Economy Research Institute. The study indicated that military spending was the most inefficient stimulus method when compared to health care, education, mass transit, and construction for home weatherization and infrastructure repair for every $1 billion spent. That rationale clicked with House appropriators, who worried that the pay scale for nuclear-related jobs was too high, the jobs created per dollar too low.

'Legitimate Work That Had to be Done'

One Hill staffer defended the stimulus funding, however. "Was this going to build a new nuclear bomb? Hell no," the staffer said. "These were facilities that needed to be demolished or needed to be refurbished to be made useful. All of this stuff was legitimate work that had to be done, that would stimulate the economy, that could be done quickly and down the road save the government money in terms of hotel costs. And a lot of them were green energy

projects, so that checked a box, too. They were really small little things but a lot of them. You were going to put a lot of blue collar guys to work."

The NNSA had put together the wish list of projects, including many—like several hundred million dollars for the Mixed Oxide Fuel Fabrication Facility being built at the Savannah River Site—that were not included in plans for the bill. But after the stimulus money had been eliminated from the bill, NNSA Administrator Thomas D'Agostino refocused on stable budgets for the agency. "What I will say is that I always liked the idea of having some [budgetary] stability and understanding," D'Agostino said Feb. 12 at an Energy Communities Alliance meeting. "A stimulus could be good, it could be bad. I see some distractions associated with getting a huge chunk of money coming into a large organization, figuring out a special way to manage it with lots of expectations from the outside that it's going to solve everyone's problems. Then there are temptations along either the executive branch or Congress to reduce out-year budgets because you got that money earlier. I would rather have a solid five-year commitment of resources and then let me run the program based on that."

—Todd Jacobson

NNSA NARROWS FOCUS FOR PRODUCTION CONTRACT OVERHAUL

The National Nuclear Security Administration has abandoned plans to explore purchasing nuclear or non-nuclear parts or production services from contractors as part of a revamped contracting strategy for the agency's production sites, according to a recently released document from the Acquisition Strategy Team assembled to study various contract options. The team, headed up by Sandia Site Office Manager Patty Wagner and NNSA headquarters procurement advisor Walt Lips, has narrowed its focus to nuclear and non-nuclear consolidation options at the agency's production sites, breaking out some functions for separate contracts as well as keeping the current contracting system in place.

An option that would use contractor-owned, contractor-operated facilities (COCOs)—similar to the arrangement the NNSA's Office of Naval Reactors has with Babcock & Wilcox and B&W's newly acquired subsidiary Nuclear Fuel Services—has been shelved, at least while the team is pressing to meet a March 31 deadline for delivering a contracting strategy. "I think the Department would always consider that option if it makes sense," one NNSA official told *NW&M Monitor*. "Whether you can do it for a nuclear facility, that's another thing. There are COCOs now that Naval Reactors uses, so that is potentially a viable option, but in the short term, it didn't seem like this was the time to consider it."

Functional Areas Come Into Focus

With the contracts for the NNSA's three main production facilities at Pantex, Y-12 and the Kansas City Plant expiring in 2010, the NNSA began exploring a change to its production contracts in the fall of 2007. But the agency's first effort ended with a headquarters team deadlocked over the consolidation of some M&Os and using function-based contracts. Wagner was tasked to lead the AST in September and formed four teams to address mission need, cost, contracting provisions and the impact of potential changes on the federal workforce and communications.

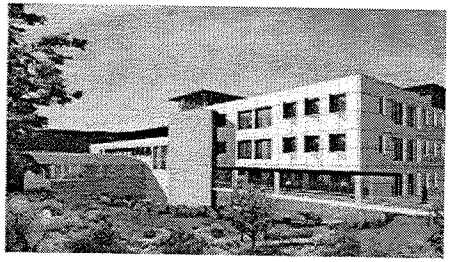
According to a summary of the team's work, in addition to maintaining the current contracting structure, the team is considering seven options for various forms of consolidation, including:

- Nuclear production at Y-12 and Pantex;
- Nuclear production at Y-12 and Pantex with Savannah River tritium production;
- Nuclear production at Y-12 and Pantex with Savannah River tritium and Los Alamos production;
- Nuclear production at Y-12 and Pantex with Los Alamos production;
- Non-nuclear production at the Kansas City Plant and Sandia National Laboratories;
- Non-nuclear production at the Kansas City Plant with Savannah River tritium production; and
- Non-nuclear production at the Kansas City Plant and Sandia with Savannah River tritium.

The use of function-based contracts was not included in the original summary documented posted on a procurement Web site earlier this month, though an NNSA official said the omission was unintentional. The agency is focusing on breaking out security, construction management and some elements of information technology as part of the contracting strategy, an option that Lips said in December brought its own set of pros and cons. "There is potential savings there but there are also a lot of complications, not least of which is it would be very difficult for the NNSA to implement multiple prime contracts at one time and to deal with multiple interfaces among prime contracts at the site," Lips said. "So we've got to deal with all those issues. We certainly saw the potential value there, and we don't want to lose it and we're continuing to carry on with this acquisition strategy."

Print this article
3-11-09

Crunch time ahead for CMRR



By ROGER SNODGRASS, Monitor Editor

Old adversaries met again Tuesday evening to discuss the status of the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement facility.

"The CMRR is a major systems acquisition," said Steve Fong of the National Nuclear Security Administration's local site office in his introduction. "We haven't seen anything of this size for a long while."

The CMRR is a $2 billion-plus project which expects to finish its first and least expensive building this year.

The $158 million Radiological Lab Utility Office Building, RLUOB, or Rad Lab, as it is also known, has about six months of work left, or about 184,000 hours of a couple hundred workers' time, before it begins to be equipped and furnished.

Next door, the somewhat larger and far more expensive Nuclear Facility awaits an uncertain future. Only its foundation has been excavated.

The two sides seemed almost to enjoy the discussion, despite having been locked into a multi-year dialogue in exchange for an air permit easement for the Rad Lab site.

The cons, designated as the Interested Parties for legal purposes, are composed of seven public interest groups.

They found opportunities to be complementary to their counterparts, perhaps because they were given time on the schedule to make their own presentation and the format allowed for a more equal share of talking and listening time.

"This is our first presentation, our seventh meeting," said Scott Kovac of Nuclear Watch New Mexico, powering up his slides.

The pros, legally the Applicants in this context, work for the laboratory or its federal supervisors. They made up the majority of an audience of a few dozen people.

The applicants were gratified that Congress had just passed a bill for the remainder of the year, funding the CMRR with another $97.2 million, thanks to a Senate dispensation. That compares to last year's $79 million.

Surely changes were on the way from Washington, but this year's budget was very close to what the CMRR project requested.

At the same time, the Interested Parties expressed some satisfaction that the pit manufacturing mission and Reliable Replacement Warhead program which had been significant justifications for the CMRR had become invisible in the latest budget.

That would tend to reduce the need for the CMRR.

"It is not needed in the view of the House of Representatives in recent years," said Greg Mello of the Los Alamos Study Group.

The discussion boiled down to two basic questions, whether the Nuclear Facility was needed and whether it was adequate to withstand seismic events.

On the first point, the laboratory has always pointed to the antiquated CMR complex on life-extension that is being replaced. Officials argue that there are demands from throughout the government for the functions the building performs, including the weapons work.

Whether they are making one pit or 80, they say, they need the full CMRR.

Specializing in chemical analysis and material characterization, according to a project rationale, the building is also needed for many kinds of nuclear materials handling, stockpile management, future research in materials and manufacturing, non-proliferation programs and waste management.

The planned storage vaults will enable the consolidation of nuclear materials not only from Los Alamos but also from across the complex.

Additional assurance has been provided on the safety issues by a provision included in the FY09 budget bill calling for the Defense Nuclear Facility Safety Board to be jointly involved in the safety certifications for the facility, including the seismic issues.

That needs to be accomplished no later than July 2009, in order for the second half of this year's budget to be released.

LANL project manager for CMRR, Rick Holmes emphasized that this process was working well and that the project was committed to providing the safety board representatives with the "certainty of confidence," that they required.

All agreed that future funding for the Nuclear Facility remains uncertain, although they disagreed whether that was good or bad.

In a memo written by the DNFSB for the week ending Jan. 2, 2009, LANL had submitted an evaluation for an exit strategy for the old CMR buildings that would not rely on constructing the Nuclear Facility.

"The report asserts that all options evaluated given this constraint substantially increase the safety, security and programmatic risks at LANL versus the current approved baseline," the site representative wrote.

There will be more to talk about next time, when next year's budget will have set the next course in motion.

NUCLEAR

From Page A1

Plutonium Facility for those weapons won't be on order any time soon.

Clark's personal opinion is that some members of Congress and the public in general are confused about the purpose of the CMRR.

"The myth that we're going to build pits in the CMRR is so far from the truth," he said.

Laboratory officials have lately re-emphasized the traditional bread-and-butter operations of the facility. The basic certification work on the nuclear stockpile will continue, along with all the other work that has been going on in the old facility, including nuclear forensics, safeguards, non-proliferation, counter-terrorism and environmental and waste management.

New operations transferring in as the national nuclear weapons complex reduces its footprint place ever greater demands on the space.

"Just to clarify," said NNSA Administrator Tom D'Agostino in his appropriation subcommittee testimony, "we're not building pits in the nuclear facility."

In recent years, decisions made at the House subcommittee level have been routinely approved up the ladder by the full committee and the full House. This is probably why Rep. Zach Wamp, R-Tenn., called the hearing "the most important hearing this committee is going to have this year."

Wamp is one of two representatives on the committee from Tennessee who were supportive of their own local mega-project at the Y-12 National Security Complex near Oak Ridge.

The Uranium Processing Facility is also in the big-ticket range and Wamp was able to say that he was hearing a consensus favoring the UPF, "only streamlined."

"What are ways to streamline CMRR?" he asked.

Two of the panelists took a shot at the question.

Everett Beckner, former Deputy Administrator, Defense Programs at NNSA suggested more belt-tightening. "If we work harder on restricting our own ambitions, we can keep these things a little smaller than they otherwise might become," he said.

Richard Garwin, former chairman of the State Department Arms Control and Nonproliferation Advisory Board and a JASON consultant, was more critical.

Of the two buildings, Garwin noted that the research laboratory was pretty well constructed.

"I would suggest doing without the nuclear facility," he said bluntly. Garwin firmly supported the need to retain and attract a highly qualified workforce for the weapons complex, but he also thinks that a rapid reduction in the nuclear weapons stockpile could have a significant impact on other needs. He said he would, as an alternative, look at expanding TA-55."

One of D'Agostino's points, however, was that the current plan provided for minimum needs regardless of scale.

"It's extremely important to recognize and take into account that neither our workforce numbers, nor the square footage of our facilities scale linearly with the size of the stockpile," he said.

"Establishing a minimum capability to support a greatly reduced stockpile enabled by its very existence in a modern facility a sufficient minimum capability to support the likely range of future stockpile scenarios."

Range of conclusions

Greg Mellow of the Los Alamos Study Group who attended the hearings and talked to a number of officials before and afterward, said he could not tell which way the committee might go.

"There's a lot of momentum in the NNSA planning process," he said. "These things were planned six years ago and that reflects the slow time constant in nuclear policy generally."

There seems to be a widely held recognition that the infrastructure budget for NNSA is not fully realistic. Whether new money will be discovered or somebody will rob Peter to pay Paul, or whether ambitions will be downscaled, I don't know."

In his opening statement, subcommittee chairman, Rep. Peter Visclosky, D-Ind. noted the process was "circumscribed" by the Presidential transition and the fact that a number of studies, like the Nuclear Posture Review, would not be completed until early next year.

"We can say with confidence that President Obama's stockpile plan will be different from that we see today," he said.

Regardless of the mission, Clark said, the replacement facility is necessary.

"For all the new missions, whether it is getting rid of the weapons, developing alternative energy or getting rid of the waste, we still need new facilities to do it. We need an infrastructure to work in. There's plutonium out there. We've got to deal with that."

The committee hearing on Tuesday was webcast by the House Appropriations Committee. The written testimony by the panel members is available on the subcommittee website, http://appropriations.house.gov/Subcommittees/sub_ew.shtml/

Opening round 3-22-09

Nuclear facility enters gauntlet

ROGER SNODGRASS
roger@lamonitor.com
Monitor Editor

As a key Congressional committee met to discuss next year's budget for the nuclear weapons complex, a high priority project for Los Alamos National Laboratory was one of several big ticket items that shared the spotlight.

LANL has a demonstrable need to get out of its obsolete, circa 1952, Chemistry and Metallurgy Research (CMR) facility and wants to relocate its capabilities to a brand new Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement (CMRR).

But the House Appropriations Energy and Water Development subcommittee has been unwilling to cover the cost, which has multiplied several times and ballooned to $2.6 billion according to current estimates.

The deliberations take place against a backdrop of a critically depressed economy and huge budget deficits.

Analysis

The need

Laboratory Fellow David Clark is one of many LANL administrators with a stake in the outcome. He is the director of the Seaborg Institute, which coordinates actinide science and education at the lab.

Actinide science focuses on 15 radioactive heavy elements in the periodic table from actinium to lawrencium and including uranium and plutonium. Clark worked in the CMR building in the 90s.

"It was good news to all of us when we heard we might get a modern facility to replace it," he recalled. Since then he has been a participant in designing the new CMRR facility, where he hopes the institute will have a laboratory some day.

Plans first developed around the question of what was reasonably needed to take the place of the CMR in the modern era. Since then, Clark said, speaking for himself, the pressure has been "to shrink it down."

The square-foot for square-foot swap once hoped for between the old building and the two new replacement buildings has been deemed "unaffordable."

Meanwhile safety and security demands and the transformation process under way in the nuclear weapons complex have all forced back-to-the-drawing-board revisions that have added substantially to the costs and the role of the facility.

Among other pressures, Los Alamos has been designated as the site where plutonium is supposed to be consolidated for the nuclear weapons complex. Large, secure, earthquake-proof vaults are built into the Nuclear Facility (NF), the largest and most expensive of the two buildings that make up the CMRR. The NF is still unfunded beyond the design phase.

Signals from appropriators

The House appropriations subcommittee was instrumental in cutting and finally zeroing out funding for the Reliable Replacement Warhead program, which was once of great moment to the laboratory's sponsors and was used to justify CMRR.

But it is now clear that the new nuclear pits that LANL would have been expected to produce next door in LANL's

See **NUCLEAR**, *A7*

David L. Clark is the director of the G. T. Seaborg Institute at LANL.

Sunday, April 26, 2009

Numbers Can't Hide Poverty in New Mexico

By Greg Mello

Thank you for the data-rich column of April 19, "Report Shows New Mexicans Faring OK in Economy," regarding Colorado College's "State of the Rockies" economic report card.

The main observation — that New Mexico, not having grown as much economically as other nearby states in recent years, is not (yet) falling as far either — is cold comfort.

As you note, New Mexico still has the highest poverty and lowest median family income in the intermountain states. Our state ranks near the bottom of all states in these measures.

This wasn't always so. Our descent got under way only after 1972, when we fell from 37th in income rank to near the bottom.

This report, like so many others, is careless about meaningless averages, resulting in your highly misleading headline. New Mexico's combination of high income disparity and high poverty means that averages and even median statistics don't tell the real story. Blending data from Los Alamos and Rio Arriba counties, for example, obscures most of the important truths about these places.

The report says New Mexico is among the better-educated of the intermountain states. This isn't true if we take the nuclear laboratories out of the mix — which we must, because they aren't embedded in our civilian economy.

As with income, the educational situation is somewhat bipolar. New Mexico's educational performance is at or very near the bottom of all states. The U.S. as a whole is not being educated well — far from it — so if we climbed halfway up in U.S. rankings we would still be pretty ignorant in comparison to most of our economic peers worldwide.

The report's long-term projections are even more problematic. Anybody who makes a 50-year projection — or even one for 10 years, right now — is not very reality-based. Those projections are just fantasies.

New Mexico and the U.S. are becoming poorer in real terms, and more income-disparate. In many ways our state's government is failing to address the problems at hand. We don't see the failure because we're all so used to it.

What's new is that the cost of failure is now extreme. Climate change is hitting the state hard and will hit much harder in the coming decade and beyond. Water quantity and quality are both entering a critical period; our vegetation, wildlife, agriculture, and cities are all threatened as the landscape dries. Nationally, our serious economic problems will not be overcome any time soon, and that's an understatement. Oil production has peaked, masked and exacerbated by recession.

For all these reasons and more, the state is in crisis, far worse than any I have seen in my 29 years here.

So my plea is for all of us to use every opportunity — here provided by a naive study — to cut through the denial that supports our failure to save ourselves and our planet. Our news media must abandon some bad habits and help lead the way. We all need more outrage and more impatience, assuming we want to act rather than be acted upon.

I know of no sound, practical economic, energy, environmental, or climate policy that does not address first and foremost the needs of the vulnerable in our society, and of vulnerable species in the living landscape. Respect is the common key to all these thorny issues, and the sole basis of a green, sustainable economy – the only economy we will have.

It starts with awareness. For this reason if for no other, the reality of poverty must be seen and heard clearly, not covered over by meaningless averages and mindless boosterism.

Mello is director of the Los Alamos Study Group, www.lasg.org, in Albuquerque.

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Obama and CTBT Ratification: Dangerous Distraction

Greg Mello | Los Alamos Study Group

Today, [U.S. Vice President and CTBT ratification point person Joe] Biden again will be in a pivotal position to win approval of a controversial treaty. This time, to secure enough votes for passage of the CTBT, he will need to sit down and work out an arrangement with [senators] Kyl and Sessions, House Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, and other key Republicans such as McCain and Lugar. What compromises and agreements will be necessary are anybody's guess. But the key will likely not be facts or persuasive arguments, but rather a painstakingly and carefully negotiated deal. - John Isaacs, "A strategy for achieving Senate approval of the CTBT," Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, April 15, 2009

President Obama has placed Senate ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) near the top of his arms control and nonproliferation agenda. As John Isaacs points out above, near-term U.S. ratification will: a) be quite difficult; b) not hinge on "facts or persuasive arguments;" and c) require a "carefully negotiated deal." This deal will be political, as it was in 1996, beneath a technical façade. The names of the very conservative senators Isaacs invokes indicate the gravity and potential scope of any such deal. The dangers involved in such a process can hardly be overstated.

The CTBT we have today is the fruit of decades of work by thousands of people. It is also a much more significant treaty now than it was when first opened for signature thirteen years ago. Currently 180 states have signed the treaty and 148 have ratified it. The organization created by the treaty – the CTBTO – appears strong, and the worldwide monitoring network is better than ever. The treaty's norm against nuclear testing is robust, perhaps exactly as strong as its signatories want it to be in any given situation. Certainly that norm has been accepted to a very high degree by most nuclear weapon states.

For example, while it is still common for hawks in the U.S. to mutter about having to conduct a nuclear test under this or that hypothetical circumstance, nuclear testing by the U.S. is now inconceivable. The cutting edge of arms control and disarmament has moved on to other issues. There is an unspoken but broad consensus among U.S. elites that there are no circumstances whatsoever in which the U.S. would find it in its national interest to ever conduct a nuclear test. If there ever were such a circumstance, it would certainly command support for withdrawal from the CTBT under its withdrawal clause.

CTBT ratification would not change U.S. testing behavior, then, and at this point no one seriously conceives of the treaty in those terms. All talk of "returning to nuclear testing" is a ritualized form of speech aimed at extracting some kind of budgetary or policy concession. If the Administration pursues ratification it will do so because it believes ratification would help curb proliferation – that is, help change other states' actions.

What deals might be required to get U.S. ratification in the next three years, and how might any such deals affect broader disarmament and nonproliferation aims? The price of ratification can be expressed in precise political terms: what it will take to convince the 67th senator to vote for it. While we can be fairly confident there are 60 votes for ratification, it's a very long way to 67. The political topography gets very steep. The votes just aren't there.

Since a (second) Senate vote against ratification would be a serious setback for the Administration, the Treaty, and nonproliferation efforts generally, and since Republican Party discipline

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Reaching Critical Will
A project of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

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Obama and CTBT Ratification (cont.)

will make it difficult to be sure of the vote count ahead of time, it may be wise to have some expected extra votes in addition to the bare 67, prior to fully committing to a final vote. This obviously raises the barrier even higher.

The high price of closing today's 7-vote gap could set limits on U.S. disarmament diplomacy for years to come, and could also forestall the gradual budgetary disinvestment in nuclear weapons that quietly began in 2006. To buy the votes needed, the CTBT will have to become, as far as the U.S. is concerned, a nuclear sustainment treaty.

Any ratification deal would be aimed, in part, precisely at negating the treaty's disarmament impact. At a minimum, any such deal would attempt to inoculate the nuclear weapons establishments of the Department of Defense and Department of Energy against institutional decline, as much as possible.

Elements of any deal might include floors under nuclear weapons budgets, commitments to develop new missiles, submarines, and reentry vehicles, promises to re-open the prospect of new warheads (as a Council on Foreign Relations panel recommended last week), commitments to new warhead factories (the fate of which is currently hanging in the balance), commitments to creating nuclear weapons educational and training programs and scholarships to ensure the availability of skilled workers, and so on.

There is a general sense among U.S. hawks that the nuclear weapons establishment is under siege, perhaps not so much by specific people or policies as by history itself. Capabilities are indeed being lost. Budgets are drifting down; people are retiring; knowledge and above all ideological commitment to nuclear weapons are being lost. Meanwhile the cost of doing business is rising.

At the same time there is a slow but much-needed sea-change in government priorities going on, a gradual redefinition of national security. This process is going to intensify year by year as an interrelated set of all-pervading, profound crises related to finance and economic growth, social inequity, food, energy, and climate increasingly grip the attention of governments. Nuclear weapons are expensive, irrelevant distractions, among their many other liabilities.

In this shifting and uncertain scene, the CTBT ratification process will be viewed by many actors—defense ideologues, nuclear contractors, and pork-barrel politicians—as a means to protect the U.S. nuclear establishment against the vicissitudes of time. There will be many nuclear hawks who relish the ratification process for the opportunity it presents to get favorable legislative outcomes they could not be obtain any other way.

A CTBT tied to additional, extensive "safeguards" like the examples listed above might well tarnish the treaty in the eyes of many parties, even more than the current surrogate testing capabilities available to the U.S. and other advanced nuclear weapons states.

For all these reasons it is worthwhile for members of the international community to begin an open dialogue with the State Department and others about the ratification process, lest a handful of conservative U.S. senators dictate the CTBT's future—and much other nuclear policy—here.

CTBT ratification has become a shibboleth in arms control circles. The U.S. will ratify this treaty if and when it has no meaning. For now, it is a dangerous distraction. When the fruit is ripe, it will fall. That time is not yet.

Greg Mello is executive director of the Los Alamos Study Group in New Mexico.

Nuclear Cryptoquote

The following jumbled sentence is a quote by a Nobel Peace Prize recipient. Each letter represents another letter - and there is a pattern! The first to decipher the quote, name the author, and tell a member of the Reaching Critical Will team will receive a prize.

"...JXLEGLJC IRR LFJRCIB VXSCBM, GLJRFNGLW YPXMC SPGJP PIEC TCCL OXBC BCRFJYILY FV YX LXS, XZ YPC LCJCMMGYA YX BCMVCJY YPC 'EGYIR GLYCBCMYM' XZ IRR VCXVRCM ILN YX TCJXOC ZFRRA ISIBC XZ YPC VBXZXFLN YBFYP XZ YPC ZXRRXSGLW JXLJRFMGXL SPGJP YPC FLGYCN LIYGXLM IVVBXECN TA FLILGOGYA ZXFB ACIBM IWX: "OILHGLN GM JXLZBXLYCN SGYP I JPXGJC: SC OFMY PIRY YPC IBOM BIJC ILN VBXJCCN YX NGMIBOIOCLY XB ZIJC ILLGPGRIYGXL."

 ■ Daily 50 cents

Obama Proposes Cuts At LANL

Budget Takes $140M From Weapons Lab

BY JOHN FLECK AND MICHAEL COLEMAN
Journal Staff Writers

The Obama administration Thursday proposed a $140 million budget cut for Los Alamos National Laboratory in 2010, a 7 percent reduction in the nuclear weapons laboratory's budget.

OBAMA: Budget shifts money to energy

Sandia National Laboratories, New Mexico's other major National Nuclear Security Administration, escaped the budget knife, seeing a cut in nuclear spending but offsetting increases in energy research as the new administration shifts priorities.

The budget offers the first detailed look at the Obama administration's spending priorities. The proposal now goes to Congress, where House and Senate appropriators will have the chance to make changes before the fiscal year begins Oct. 1.

The total proposed Department of Energy spending in New Mexico for Sandia, Los Alamos and a number of smaller facilities is $4 bil-

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President Proposes Cuts at LANL

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lion in 2010, down from $4.[illegible] billion this year.

The biggest portion of the Los Alamos cuts involved two major construction projects — a proposed new plutonium laboratory, and a major upgrade to the lab's neutron accelerator.

Decisions about the plutonium lab will be delayed for a year. The administration wants to kill the accelerator upgrade, officials said. But by keeping the major cuts to future construction projects, the budget leaves the lab's core scientific work force relatively unscathed.

The lab spending recommendations are part of the Department of Energy's $26 billion budget, which Energy Secretary Steven Chu unveiled at a Washington, D.C., news conference Thursday afternoon. Despite a heavy emphasis on energy research, Chu told reporters that nuclear weapons work remains an important part of his agency's mission.

"Nuclear security is still a very important part of the Department of Energy," Chu said. "There is increasing risk of nuclear proliferation, so this budget includes (money) to work on nonproliferation. We still have to maintain our nuclear security enterprise, and coupled with Recovery Act money we're going to be accelerating dramatically the Cold War legacy cleanup."

Nationwide, Chu's budget recommends $6.4 billion for maintaining U.S. nuclear weapons, unchanged from this year. Nuclear nonproliferation spending would be $2.1 billion, a 9.5 percent increase.

The budget also calls for $5.5 billion nationwide for nuclear cleanup, down 3 percent from this year.

Project delayed

Decisions on building the Los Alamos plutonium laboratory, which at $2 billion would be the largest public works project in New Mexico history, will have to wait until the Pentagon completes a review of the future needs for the U.S. nuclear arsenal, Tom D'Agostino, head of the National Nuclear Security Administration, told reporters Thursday.

It would replace a 60-year-old lab complex that federal auditors have concluded is unsafe, but that lab officials say they must continue to use until a replacement is completed.

Design work on the replacement is under way, with a $97 million budget this year. The administration recommended cutting the budget to $55 million next year.

Critics, who argue that the project is unnecessary, said they were pleased with the delay. A shrinking nuclear arsenal will eventually eliminate the need for the building entirely, said Greg Mello of the Los Alamos Study Group.

A congressionally chartered commission on Wednesday recommended making construction of the plutonium lab a priority.

The administration also singled out the upgrade to the Los Alamos Neutron Science Center as one of a long list of "wasteful programs it wanted to kill, saying in a statement that it "no longer plays a critical role in weapons research."

Sen. Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M., vowed to fight that cut, saying it is not only essential for nuclear weapons work, but is also widely used for civilian science.

In general, Bingaman said he supported the budget proposal, but said he would try to reverse the neutron science cuts.

"I believe LANSCE will play a major role in the diversification of Los Alamos into new science areas, which is why I will fight to reverse this wrong-headed decision," Bingaman said in a statement.

Sandia

Sandia, which also works on nuclear weapons, fared better. Money for Sandia to work on U.S. nuclear weapons would decline under the president's proposal, but the cuts would be completely offset by increases in money for renewable energy and nuclear nonproliferation work.

Los Alamos will also see an increase in nonproliferation work, but not enough to offset the cuts in its core nuclear weapons mission. The administration did not recommend any increase in energy research spending at Los Alamos.

The Santa Fe New Mexican (New Mexico)

May 8, 2009 Friday

BUDGET PROPOSAL COULD DELAY LANL CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS

BYLINE: SUE VORENBERG

SECTION: MAIN; Pg. A-1

LENGTH: 516 words

Funding for nuclear nonproliferation areas set for increase in plan

By Sue Vorenberg

The New Mexican

Funding for some nuclear activities -- including a controversial plutonium facility called the CMRR -- at Los Alamos National Laboratory could drop by about $90 million if the 2010 National Nuclear Security Administration budget is approved by Congress.

The budget, released by NNSA on Thursday, includes reduced funding and time delays for the lab's Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement facility, or CMRR. The facility is being built to house analytical chemistry, metallurgy and plutonium research facilities. It also includes an area where plutonium bomb cores called pits could be manufactured.

"We've slowed down the rate of some of the design work on the CMRR facility," said NNSA Administrator Thomas D'Agostino during a phone conference with reporters Thursday afternoon.

Cuts would also hit some other construction projects at the lab, with minor cuts to supercomputing and some cuts in defense nuclear security spending.

Along with the cuts, however, come increases in funding for some nuclear nonproliferation areas, including about $10 million for research and development, $16 million for accountability and $15 million for verification work, he said.

"It's a bit of a slowdown on the construction and design side and an increase in the nonproliferation side," D'Agostino said.

The agency is trying to fund two major construction projects in the nuclear complex at the same time, the CMRR and a uranium processing facility at the Y12 plant in Tennessee.

But there's not enough money for both, which is why NNSA is slowing the process on each of them by delaying design work, said Jerry Talbot, assistant deputy administrator for Nuclear Safety and Operations.

"Instead of taking money out of one project and moving it toward another, we stretched out the decision on both of those projects," Talbot said.

Officials are also waiting for the Obama Administration's Nuclear Posture Review, expected late this year or in early 2010, before deciding on more fixed budgets for the projects, D'Agostino said.

"In essence, the nation needs these facilities," he added.

Greg Mello, executive director of the **Los Alamos Study Group**, said he was pleased with the delay and reduced funding for the CMRR, because he doesn't want it to be used to make new nuclear weapons components.

"As little as three months ago a budget was submitted to Congress, a Bush budget, and it was $172 million next year for the CMRR," Mello said.

That money would have significantly ramped up construction on the facility. This year, NNSA spent about $97.2 million, and under the new budget, in 2010, NNSA will spend $55 million, he added.

In contrast to that, increases in nonproliferation funding are a positive change, Mello said.

"The NNSA portion of LANL spending declines about 6 percent overall in this budget," Mello said. "It would have declined more but there's a welcome increase in nonproliferation programs, where LANL has unique skills and the work has to be done."

Contact Sue Vorenberg

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Sunday, May 17, 2009

Better Way To Spend $2 Billion

By Greg Mello
Los Alamos Study Group

The Journal carried a critical editorial Monday about the National Nuclear Security Administration's (NNSA's) slowdown of a planned new plutonium facility at Los Alamos National Laboratory.

Even prior to the action the project's overall goals (and design) had become uncertain. NNSA didn't stop the project, though that's a good idea.

The building in question is called the "CMRR Nuclear Facility." It's one of two buildings in the misnamed "Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement" project — misnamed because the CMRR would provide additional warhead capabilities, not just "replace" those to be retired.

Construction of the first CMRR building is nearly complete. The Nuclear Facility is to be the second. If built it would comprise about half the square footage and 90 percent of the total CMRR construction cost.

The Nuclear Facility would cost "at least" $2 billion. Despite seven years of work on the project, NNSA has not been able to complete preliminary design or provide a stable cost estimate.

Using standard cost inflators, the Nuclear Facility would cost five times as much as any prior government construction project in New Mexico, excepting the interstate highways.

Because the project's primary purpose is to design and build parts for a new warhead repeatedly rejected by Congress, Newsmax.com labeled this project the national "Boondoggle No. 1" earlier this spring.

The lab space it would provide will cost $89,000 per square foot — or $618 per square inch if you prefer. LANL's existing plutonium facility, with 2.6 times the space, cost $75 million in 1978, about $201 million in today's dollars. The Nuclear Facility would add 38 percent more plutonium space at 26 times the 1978 unit cost, assuming no further increases.

Department of Energy dollars have better uses. With $2 billion DOE could pay for about 2,000 megawatts of new wind generation capacity. This would displace millions of tons of carbon pollution and save millions of gallons of fresh water every year henceforth. It would create about 30,000 new jobs in manufacturing, construction and operations.

The same dollars used to subsidize state, local government, tribal and private investment in renewable energy, energy efficiency and building weatherization would go even further.

Infrastructure choices like this tell us a lot about who we are as a people and where we are going.

They also tell us about our leadership. It will be interesting to see how our congressional delegation, all Democrats, come down on this. "Green jobs" or plutonium palace? There is only so

much money that can be wrung out of households. Choices have to be made.

Our Democrats should be under no illusions about the CMRR. The hawks on the recent Perry Commission certainly know exactly what it's for: building new-design warheads, rapidly. That's why it's their highest-priority warhead infrastructure project. It's the bellwether of the whole and they know it. It's not at all required to maintain even a very large arsenal of existing warheads for the indefinite future, as sad an outcome as that would be.

Los Alamos already has a modern plutonium facility, a quarter of which is occupied by a pit production line, largely idle. This large facility has been continuously maintained; NNSA is requesting hundreds of millions to upgrade it.

There is also a plutonium facility at Lawrence Livermore, bigger than the planned CMRR and soon to be mothballed as a high-security lab. All talk of making more pits is madness, of course.

The Journal mistakenly called Obama's nuclear weapons plan a "budget-cutting proposal." It's not. Obama would grow NNSA's budget by 9 percent next year, a big increase. Most of that growth is in nuclear nonproliferation, which would rise by 36 percent. Nuclear weapon spending is flat.

For five years the House of Representatives has been saying this building and its rationale were not ready for prime time. NNSA now agrees.

We should rejoice at this baby step. The CMRR Nuclear Facility would harm, not help, national security.

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Vol. 46, No. 178

ANALYSIS 9/6/09

D'Agostino represents steady hand

◆ *Bingaman says D'Agostino understands labs' capabilities*

SPECIAL TO THE MONITOR

Last year appearing before the House Armed Services Committee on behalf of the Bush Administration, national nuclear weapons chief Thomas D'Agostino discussed plans for consolidating the sprawling weapons complex he administers.

This year, carried over in his position by the Obama Administration, D'Agostino stressed proliferation and nonproliferation during his presentation to the committee, two sides of the same coin, which represents the arms reduction priorities of the new regime.

"My job is to take the President's Prague speech (laying out his vision for nuclear-free world) and turn that into real programs that can get implemented out in the field," D'Agostino said.

On Thursday, after serving in a continuing capacity for eight months as administrator of the National Nuclear Security Administration, D'Agostino was named to retain his current position by President Obama. He will not need to be reconfirmed by the Senate.

Senator Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M., offered a key endorsement, if not exactly a resounding one, in an announcement Thursday.

"It is very important to ensure that our labs play an expanding role in addressing our nation's key challenges, in areas ranging from renewable energy to national security," he said. "I believe Tom D'Agostino understands our laboratories' capabilities very well, will support strengthening their science resources and ensuring they play a pivotal role for the nation."

Sen. Tom Udall, D-N.M., also congratulated D'Agostino in an announcement Friday.

"Administrator D'Agostino is committed to the long-term security of both Los Alamos and Sandia National Laboratories and I am pleased to continue working with him on setting the future paths for our labs."

It has been no secret that efforts were made to find an alternative candidate who was not so closely associated with the former president.

In a commentary Thursday, *Science* magazine's Jeffrey Mervis said "several prominent scientists and nuclear policy heavyweights rejected

See HAND, 3

Courtesy

RETAINED Thomas D'Agostino gives the closing remarks at the third annual Conference on Strategic Weapons in the 21st Century (SW21). The conference was co-sponsored by Los Alamos and Lawrence Livermore National Laboratories.

HAND

From Page 1

the Administration's overtures," and others failed to make the grade because of possible confirmation problems in the Senate.

That description jibes with a similar description in the latest issue of the insider newsletter, *Nuclear Weapons & Materials Monitor*.

Arms control advocates have questioned D'Agostino's previous role as a champion for the Reliable Replacement Warhead, a program to remake nuclear weapons, supposedly in a cheaper, safer, more secure and effective way. Presumably, this philosophy continues to underpin his plans for transforming and consolidating the nuclear complex.

"Many people left, I am stayed in the national interest" said Los Alamos Site Office Deputy Manager Roger Snyder. "That gave the administration some continuity in the meantime."

Snyder said that both he and LASO Manager Don Winchell had worked for D'Agostino.

"Everyone has confidence in his ability as a leader," he said.

Greg Mello, executive director of the Los Alamos Study Group offered a measured perspective from the anti-nuclear viewpoint in an e-mail Thursday.

"In my view Mr. D'Agostino has grown while in this job. He is certainly a nuclear "true believer — nobody should have any illusions about that — but he is also a pragmatist, intelligent and decisive," Mello said. "The biggest problem at NNSA is not any particular leader, but the fact that decisions are made in a bubble; the operating rules of the bubble were written during the Cold War and rewritten largely along the same lines during Clinton and Bush years, and this bubble sits within the larger national security establishment of Washington, D.C."

D'Agostino's appointment came just after the Office of Management and Budget quietly withdrew its efforts to transfer NNSA's function to the Defense Department, an idea that was panned by Bingaman and Sen. Byron Dorgan, D-N.D., who chairs the Senate appropriation subcommittee with responsibility for Department of Energy funding.

Theannouncementalso precedes a series of high-level policy documents that will begin to roll out as Congress returns to business after Labor Day. Among them is the third Nuclear Posture Review, a combined assessment by the Departments of Defense, Energy and State on what the nation needs and plans to do over the next five to 10 years to coordinate nuclear policy, strategy and forces.

An unclassified, executive summary of a Global Nuclear Security report on the security of nuclear weapons and nuclear weapons materials outside the United States was due this week but will be delayed until sometime after Sept. 7.

D'Agostino's appointment calls attention to a number of high-level appointments yet to be filled at NNSA including the deputy administrator role, along with top executives for defense programs and defense nuclear nonproliferation.

Thomas D'Agostino: "A Right Middle Ground"

At the conference on Conference on Strategic Weapons in the 21st Century (SW21) earlier this year, Thomas D'Agostino addressed the lack of common ground in the United States related to nuclear weapons, as he discussed the role of the National Nuclear Security Administration.

"It may be possible to achieve a national consensus, a 'right middle ground' on the meaning of nuclear security. Nuclear weapons have in the past deterred nuclear war and have provided security assurance to allies," he said.

"Today they remain factors in the security calculations of other countries. While the overall security environment is less certain than it was, assurance is still important.

"We also need renewed emphasis on preventing diversion of nuclear materials and weapons, and on our ability to attribute the origins of any materials used in a nuclear attack.

"NNSA will remain a vital part of the nuclear security enterprise. The Administration marshals unique skills and capabilities, including responsibilities for nuclear weapon, counterterrorism, nonproliferation, nuclear forensics, incident response, and research and development. In order to be responsible stewards of our nuclear capability, the enterprise requires a strong science and technology base."

Wednesday, October 07, 2009

$47M Released for LANL Plutonium Lab

By Sue Major Holmes
The Associated Press

ALBUQUERQUE — The federal government has released $47 million toward a long-planned plutonium research lab at Los Alamos National Laboratory, a project Los Alamos officials say is vital but that nuclear watchdogs contend only positions the U.S. to build more nuclear weapons.

The building would replace an aging lab where scientists analyze samples of plutonium and other radioactive materials.

The current structure was built more than 50 years ago and upgraded earlier this decade at a cost of $90 million. About half of it has been shut down, largely because Los Alamos does not want to make further upgrades.

The Energy Department late last year approved a program limiting the most dangerous nuclear material to Los Alamos and four other sites, reflecting a significant decline in the number of warheads the United States maintains and an expectation of more reductions.

Greg Mello of the Albuquerque-based Los Alamos Study Group contends the National Nuclear Security Administration can maintain the safety of the nuclear arsenal even without the lab's Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement building, known as CMRR.

The real impetus for the new building, he believes, is that the current one "has aged to the point it cannot house NNSA's ambitions for the future."

Mello said CMRR would position Los Alamos to make large numbers of new plutonium pit designs — the triggers of nuclear weapons.

"We view this building as a grotesque misallocation of taxpayer money and a poke in the eye to our disarmament obligations," he said.

Los Alamos officials say they need the replacement to tell what makes up materials. Plutonium, for example, contains impurities, requiring samples to be tested and retested.

CMRR is not just about plutonium, project manager Rick Holmes said. "My scope for this project is not to expand capabilities but to replace existing capabilities," he said.

A host of elements for purposes ranging from biomedicine to geology need to be

studied, and if Los Alamos wasn't doing pit production, CMRR would be needed for other science, Holmes said.

"The size isn't driven by numbers (of weapons) in the stockpile. ... If we want to have a scientist who understands plutonium or americium in 50 years, we have to have a place to do science," he said.

DOE and Los Alamos officials say it would cost too much to upgrade the current metallurgy structure compared to building a smaller, safer and more efficient one. "It's substantially harder to modify an existing house than to build a new one," Holmes said. "You always end up compromising something."

There's no exact cost figure for CMRR, but a U.S. Senate report last year estimated it at $2.6 billion — more than five times the initial estimate of about $500,000. "As time passes, things don't get cheaper," Holmes said.

The price tag must await a final design, which cannot be done until completion of an ongoing national nuclear posture review. The Pentagon began work in April on the report on threats and deterrent capabilities. It's due next year.

Mello said the expense of CMRR "is a commitment to a particular vision for Los Alamos National Laboratory," one that lays the groundwork for an expanding nuclear program and increases the relative importance of producing plutonium pits over other lab programs.

Holmes said Congress decides funding priorities, adding, "Somehow we found $700 billion for the TARP program," the official name of the stimulus package.

The just-released $47 million is part of the project's second phase. The money will continue preliminary design work and will buy equipment for CMRR labs and the laboratory portion of the project's first phase, a related $199 million office building.

Last month marked the completion of much of that first building, which includes offices for up to 350 people and 19,500 square feet of laboratory space.

Equipment is being installed and Holmes said people will move into offices in the fall of 2011 and start radiological experiments in the laboratory section in 2013.

Mello said labs in the office building more than replace what the old structure had, but Holmes said they're not sufficient for all the work Los Alamos performs.

For example, labs in the office building are allowed to have only 8.4 grams of plutonium, about a thimble's worth, for experiments. Holmes said sample preparation and materials characterization work require larger amounts, making CMRR necessary.

Scientists Defend Nuclear Physicist

10-27-09

FBI Investigation Called 'Foolish'

By Heather Clark
The Associated Press

LOS ALAMOS — Scientists familiar with the work of a former Los Alamos National Laboratory nuclear physicist whose house was searched by the FBI say he is not a spy.

Hugh DeWitt, a retired physicist who worked at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California, called the FBI action against scientist P. Leonardo Mascheroni foolish.

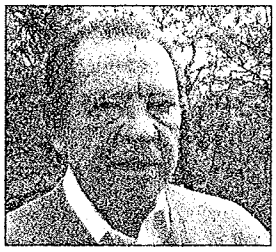
"The FBI action is stupid and foolish and misguided and utterly wrong," said DeWitt, a retired physicist who was a lecturer in the physics department at the University of California in Berkeley when Mascheroni was a doctoral student there.

"There's nothing classified or secret in this at all. His files are big papers, letters and mission statements. There's nothing whatever that would endanger national security," he said.

An FBI spokesman has confirmed that the agency is pursuing an investigation but declined to comment further on Monday.

Mascheroni has insisted the U.S. government is wrongly targeting him. His home was searched Oct. 19, and the FBI seized computers, letters, photographs, books and cell phones. No charges have been filed.

Mascheroni thinks the FBI is investigating after he gave a CD containing what he called unclassified information to a man claiming to represent Venezuela.



JOURNAL FILE

Former LANL scientist P. Leonardo Mascheroni says he's being investigated for spying.

He said he approached Venezuela only after the United States rejected his theories that support a hydrogen-fluoride laser to produce nuclear energy.

He said he hoped the information would persuade Venezuela not to go forward with a nuclear weapons program.

He was paid $20,000 for the work by a man he believed represented the Venezuelan government. Mascheroni never spent the money, which he said was seized by the FBI.

Greg Mello, head of the lab watchdog Los Alamos Study Group, said he met Mascheroni several times during the 1990s.

"He believes physics has great promise for humanity, and he thinks that that promise has been derailed by politics and institutional greed," Mello said. "He wants it set right, and he wants to be part of what sets it right."

Quake At LANL Could Be Disastrous

Federal Auditors: Radiation Exposure a Major Concern

10-28-09

By John Fleck
Journal Staff Writer

Los Alamos National Laboratory could expose its workers and neighbors to a massive and potentially deadly radiation leak in a major earthquake, independent federal safety auditors concluded in a report released Tuesday.

Such earthquakes are rare — one every few thousand years in the Los Alamos area, according to a lab seismic study. But the consequences could be catastrophic, according to the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board.

The safety board's report calls on the National Nuclear Security Administration, which owns and oversees Los Alamos, to take immediate steps to reduce the risk of an accident.

The risk at the lab's three-decade-old Technical Area 55 plutonium complex is that an earthquake could shake loose plutonium-handling equipment in a way that starts a fire.

With systems designed to filter air also crippled by the quake, according to the safety board's analysis, plutonium could leak from the building at levels at least 100 times greater than considered safe.

The bunkerlike concrete building is used for plutonium-related research and to manufacture nuclear weapon components.

Los Alamos is built on a volcanic mesa west of Santa Fe, in what scientists now believe is an active fault zone. Research over the last two decades has demonstrated that earthquakes

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Quake Dangers Worry Auditors

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in the area are more frequent than previously believed.

The mesa, adjacent to a major and still active volcanic area, sits on the west flank of the Rio Grande Rift. Earth's crust is spreading in the area like a piece of pulled taffy, a process that created much of the Rio Grande Valley through New Mexico. Earthquakes are common along the rift's boundaries.

A lab study published in 2007 documented two or three earthquakes greater than magnitude 6.5 in the last 10,000 years. The last large quake was at least 1,400 years ago, according to the study, and scientists say there is no way to predict when the next one will happen. Since 1991, there have been five earthquakes strong enough for residents to feel, according to the study.

The safety board's report is the result of new studies over more than a decade that showed substantially higher earthquake risk at Los Alamos, said Greg Mello, head of the Los Alamos Study Group, an Albuquerque-based activist organization. Mello's group was involved in litigation in the 1990s that led to the new seismic analysis.

An earthquake and fire, Mello said, "could have permanent consequences for thousands of people, especially in Los Alamos County, but also in Santa Fe County."

A federal government analysis done last year of risks from an earthquake-triggered plutonium release at Los Alamos said the biggest public health threat would come in the form of increased cancer risk among the exposed population.

In addition to the health risks, the incident could render large areas of the lab and surrounding countryside uninhabitable and shut down work at Los Alamos, Mello said.

Spokesmen for the lab and the NNSA declined to answer questions Tuesday about the safety board's findings. Both issued statements saying the lab is working to improve safety in its plutonium facilities.

"Protecting the health and safety of our employees, the public, and the environment while conducting operations all across the Laboratory, particularly at the plutonium facility, TA-55, is our primary concern," Los Alamos spokesman Kevin Roark said in the statement.

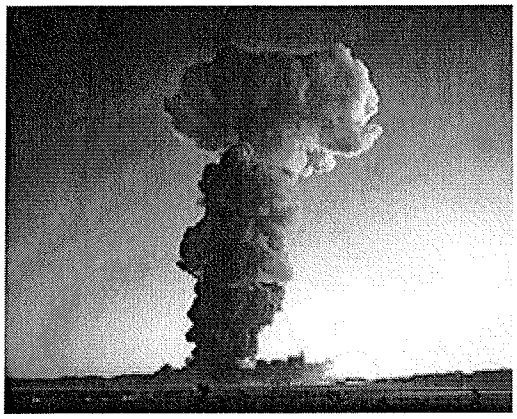
The federal government is in the midst of a $14 million project at the plutonium complex to upgrade aging building systems, including the high-efficiency air cleaners intended to prevent plutonium from escaping the building.

The upgrades do not go far enough in reducing the risk of earthquake-triggered fires inside the plutonium building, according to the safety board.

In the near term, one of the only ways to reduce the risk of a major accident is to scale back the amount of potentially dangerous plutonium work done in the building, the safety board argued.

Lab spokesman Roark issued a brief statement and referred all questions to National Nuclear Security Administration headquarters.

"We are currently evaluating the Board's recommendation and preparing a formal response," NNSA spokeswoman Jennifer Wagner said in a statement.



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Why LANL's latest media dust-up shouldn't be taken lightly

By: Alexa Schirtzinger 10/29/2009

Cross-posted at SFReeper.com

On Monday, the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board released a damning report on the safety of the main plutonium facility at Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL). The crux of the report is that in the case of a "seismic event," or major earthquake, along the geologic fault that underlies the lab, the ensuing damage (think earthquake triggers fire triggers big radioactive explosion) would be more than 100 times the allowable federal standard.

Unfortunately, that's not the worst of it. The Safety Board—along with LANL—has known this for the past five years. In 2007, the Safety Board, an independent federal agency charged with overseeing safety at all 14 sites in the US Department of Energy's nuclear weapons complex (which in New Mexico includes LANL, Sandia National Laboratories and the WIPP), released official findings that the likelihood of a seismic event along the Los Alamos fault was much higher than previously thought. The natural conclusion, of course, was that the relevant safety systems would have to be improved immediately—but according to Safety Board Vice Chair John E. Mansfield, that wasn't how it happened.

Around the time the new risk assessment came out, Mansfield says, the Safety Board was involved in an effort to get all the DOE's nuclear facilities to install active ventilation systems—ones that would keep working even in the event of a cataclysmic accident. When the increased seismic risk at Los Alamos became apparent, getting better ventilation and fire suppression systems at LANL became even more important, and Mansfield says the Safety Board "took special care to point out to Los Alamos" that its safety system was inadequate.

"Los Alamos' answer was very much delayed," Mansfield recalls, "and when we finally got it, it effectively said, 'Well, we're not going to worry about it.'" According to Mansfield, LANL was one of only two facilities that excused itself from federal safety guidelines.

"We just couldn't buy that," Mansfield says. "What we'd hoped they would say was, 'It's going to be extremely difficult; it's going to take a lot of money; it's going to take a lot of years; and we're going to commit to try to get funding,'" he continues. "But they didn't say that. They just said, "[We're] not required to meet the overall safety strategy."

After going back and forth with LANL over safety guidelines for the better part of this year, Mansfield says the Board finally warned Los Alamos that it would issue a public recommendation for safety improvements at the lab. The DOE has 45 days to accept, partially reject or reject the recommendations and 135 days to publish an implementation plan. According to Mansfield, the Safety Board even warned LANL that the recommendations would come out this month: "We said...'It would be good if you had an immediate response instead of having this thing hang out there with no word from you.'" To an extent, LANL did so; SFR received e-mails yesterday from LANL communications director Jeff Berger, who cited eight actions taken by the lab in 2009 to improve fire

safety, and from the National Nuclear Security Administration's deputy public affairs director, Jennifer Wagner, who wrote:

> "NNSA has made numerous improvements in the safety posture of its plutonium operations in recent years, which include...the approval of the first comprehensive safety analysis since 1996. That analysis identified the need for additional facility upgrades to meet the NNSA's safety goals. Although the analysis concluded that operations are currently safe, a more sophisticated analysis is needed..."

That sounds like a lot of analysis to me. If the latest analysis underscored the need for better safety...was the current safety infrastructure really "safe"?

In the end, the Safety Board's recommendations for more stringent and effective fire suppression and ventilation systems at LANL are just that: recommendations. They're not binding, but Mansfield says no Energy Secretary has ever rejected a Safety Board recommendation.

But according to Greg Mello, executive director of the Albuquerque-based Los Alamos Study Group, "the Safety Board has never exerted itself like this before." Mansfield's Oct. 26 letter to Energy Secretary Steven Chu uses words like "severity" and "urgency" to "argue forcefully for the Secretary to avail himself of the authority under the Atomic Energy Act" to implement the recommendations—wording Mello says reveals the crucial nature of the safety situation at LANL.

Still, Mello, a longtime disarmament activist, says that any action LANL takes will depend on politics. "If [US Sen. Jeff] Bingaman or [US Sen. Tom] Udall tell the lab that they better listen hard to the DNFSB, [that] they have to follow the rules," Mello says, "That will affect [LANL's] behavior." According to Mello, LANL brings too much money and too many jobs to New Mexico for anyone to want to properly question it—or, for that matter, to make a nuclear weapons lab spend a bunch of money on decidedly un-sexy safety upgrades.

"LANL has its own problems," Mansfield says. "It's got older facilities. It's got a mindset that made it great, that protected the nation for 60 years now, and it's the best scientific lab in the country, just about. We just need to convince them that some things you have to control."

Before a big earthquake convinces them, that is.

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Independent scientists say program can extend life of nation's nuclear weapons for decades

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ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. - An independent panel says the U.S. can extend the life of aging nuclear weapons for decades with existing programs, a finding that activists contend means there's no need for the nation to design replacements for the nuclear arsenal.The findings of the JASON committee are classified, but an unclassified summary released Thursday said current methods are sufficient to keep weapons reliable in the absence of nuclear testing.

The committee, made up of independent scientific experts who do technical reviews for the government, said the success of the program to extend the lifetimes of weapons "is a direct consequence of the excellent work of the people in the United States nuclear weapons complex."

The key conclusion is that the program "is working well and can work well into the foreseeable future to maintain the reliability of existing warhead types," said Daryl Kimball, executive director of the Washington, D.C.-based Arms Control Association.

The implication is that new warhead designs are not necessary because "stockpile stewardship is working well and can be expected to work indefinitely," he said.

The two national laboratories in New Mexico, Los Alamos and Sandia, are involved in the stockpile stewardship program to ensure the reliability of the nuclear stockpile.

Greg Mello of the Los Alamos Study Group said the study shows "there are no inherent long-term reliability problems associated with the careful refurbishment of existing types of warheads."

Congress has rejected efforts to develop what's called a reliable replacement warhead. In 2007, the Bush administration unsuccessfully sought $88 million for design and preliminary work on the proposed warhead.

The National Nuclear Security Administration endorsed the panel's recommendations and sent the classified report to the House Armed Services subcommittee on strategic forces, which asked for the review.

The study "validates our basic scientific approach to warhead life extension programs, specifically our commitment to evaluating each weapon system on a case-by-case basis and applying the best technological approach," NNSA spokesman Damien LaVera said in a written statement.

The panel said some issues surrounding aging weapons have been resolved, and others can be resolved under current methods.

But it also warned that stockpile surveillance is becoming inadequate. It said increasing the lifetimes of nuclear weapons depends on "continuing maintenance and renewal of expertise and capabilities in science, technology, engineering and production."

LaVera said Friday stockpile stewardship "can do certain things but there needs to be an existing funding mechanism for that."

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