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August 22, 2010

Bulletin #97: CMRR litigation: One simple thing you can do to help

Dear friends –

I would like to bring you up to date on *some* (note the emphasis) of what's been happening here at the Study Group.

First, there is an especially simple thing you could do to help this month: make a [donation](#) to the Study Group.

Write on your check, or designate your [on-line donation](#), "to help stop construction and operation of the CMRR Nuclear Facility," or words to that effect. This part is important; don't skip it please. We will not release your name or the amount of the donation.

The Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement (CMRR) Nuclear Facility is a circa \$4 billion plutonium storage, processing, and manufacturing annex at Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL), currently slated to begin construction next year. Its primary purpose is to greatly augment LANL's capacity to manufacture plutonium warhead cores ("pits").

LANL already has, and will retain with or without this proposed building, pit production capability. In fact, that capability is expanding without the proposed new building. What the proposed CMRR Nuclear Facility would provide is even more capacity, for larger and faster production runs.

Since there is a surfeit of pits for every U.S. weapon system, and since all these pits will easily outlast the proposed Nuclear Facility's useful life, should it be built, and since existing warheads could be maintained indefinitely (heaven forbid) without pit production, the proposed facility and the pits it would make are not for existing warheads. They are for new kinds of warheads. If you don't like the word "new," call them "modified" or "modernized" or "replacement" warheads, in the tradition of George Orwell – "replacement" warheads from a "replacement" facility. Better warheads, to achieve disarmament and control nuclear proliferation.

I seldom ask for your help, or for money, but this relatively small action on your part would be especially powerful at this time due to the litigation we have opened regarding the Administration's haste to build this project without an applicable environmental impact statement (EIS). We believe the Administration's course of action is patently illegal and that's why we have filed this lawsuit.

You can read more about the proposed Nuclear Facility and our litigation [here](#). The [complaint](#) (pdf) is the best summary of the lawsuit – what it's about, and its pertinent background. There's an explanatory [press release](#), and subsequent [press clippings](#). The [Energy Daily article](#) (pdf) posted there with permission, by veteran journalist George Lobsenz, provides a good overview. Lobsenz highlights the peculiar linkage the Administration has created between building a huge plutonium facility and cleanup of the biggest two nuclear dumps at LANL. *Yes, build the bomb factory, create about 400,000 cubic yards of crushed tuff and volcanic ash to dispose; no, don't clean up the dump, put the volcanic ash on it instead.* A \$4 billion weapons project trumps a comparable cleanup project.

In the long run, the proposed new building would also need cleanup, but it would almost certainly be too big and too costly to dig up and dispose somewhere else. It would become another permanent dump. Poor New Mexico.

If you are not already a Study Group donor, your gift – whether small or large, one-time or as part of a monthly sustaining donor

commitment – will also bring you a richer stream of information about what’s going on in the Study Group than we send to this broad list. We’ll tell you more about what you can do to help us, or join with us.

So please, take just a moment and [make a donation on-line](#) or, better, mail a check to the office, (2901 Summit Place NE, Albuquerque, NM 87106). In either case include a simple statement endorsing our efforts to halt construction of a new bomb factory in Los Alamos. You could also email [Trish](#), or call her at 505-265-1200, to arrange a gift of stock or make any other special arrangements.

We need your support in whatever form you wish to provide it. Your voice, channeled through us, is important in this matter.

We’ve been in Washington dozens of times over the past few years talking to lawmakers and their staff and many other parties about nuclear policy, and most of all about the infrastructure and programs which design, test, and build warheads. We’ve observed that the alignment of nonprofits with Democratic Party aims, strongly enforced by major foundations, has substantially co-opted what was once a fairly vibrant and diverse opposition. Now it isn’t vibrant, isn’t diverse, and cheerleading has largely replaced opposition.

There is muted opposition to this proposed factory in a few places, usually contradictory to other organizational aims. Muted opposition will not be enough. Building this factory is a key demand of Senate Republicans in return for a possible “yes” on “New START” ratification. President Obama and Vice-President Biden have been lobbying personally in favor of a proposed big increase in nuclear weapons spending, including CMRR-NF. As far as I know there are as yet no arms control or disarmament organizations except us who have been willing to say that the “deal” for New START ratification, including CMRR-NF, is just not worth it.

That may change.

Here’s a strange thing. Despite the proposed Nuclear Facility’s overwhelming political support, a small but increasing number of sophisticated observers – not necessarily “on our side,” whatever that means – are commenting to us privately that they do not think this monster will be built. In part they are taking our efforts seriously, and looking forward to our success, but mostly they are anticipating the effects of the converging crises now beginning to break on the world, on our failing empire, and on what was once our republic.

What this project needs, at a minimum, is a pause, a “time out” in parenting language, for mutual education. That’s why writing an EIS on the CMRR-NF while continuing to invest in it would be useless. An injunction is necessary. For that we want and need your help.

Please understand the scale of this project. It is about three times the size of Governor Richardson’s statewide highway GRIP project and about ten times the size of the Big I or the Rail Runner projects. In constant dollars it’s about the same size as building I-40 or I-25 across the whole state. Nothing else in New Mexico’s history comes close.

According to LANL, this project would hire an average of just 450 craft workers over its 10 years of construction. That’s all. Some of these would have to come from out of state. Other professional specialties would be involved, both in-state and out-of-state, but the sad truth is that New Mexico would see very few jobs from this massive boondoggle. It appears that this project would increase direct New Mexico jobs by...wait for it...0.06%. This is nuclear corporate predation pure and simple, with “modernized” weapons of mass destruction as the clearly-stated goal.

So, what else can you do? A lot. The facts on the ground, our lawsuit, and the realities of our economic decline are opening doors for effective citizen participation. Don’t expect history to change by filling out a pre-printed postcard or emailing some “e-gram” to your senator. It won’t.

The first thing to do, please, is to send a donation large or small, with a note designating your donation “to help stop construction and operation of the CMRR Nuclear Facility.” or words to that effect. Then if you want to know how else to help, please call, write, or add a note to *that* effect to your check or [on-line donation](#).

In the meantime, read the [legal complaint](#) (pdf), and learn about the proposed CMRR-NF from our [web page](#). If you want to help, there is no substitute for self-education at this stage. Make a list of the questions you have and keep it evolving, because those will be the same questions others will ask too. Then, if you haven’t done so already, please write or call. Depending on the overall level of interest (and its locations), we will meet with you and others in a group and answer everyone’s questions face-to-face.

There is a great deal more to say, but that’s enough for this Bulletin. In brief: the long-awaited pit factory at LANL is encountering headwinds, including our lawsuit, and for good reason. We want your explicit support, which would be a first step in greater involvement if you want it.

Please forward this bulletin (as an attachment) to any friends you think might be interested. If they want to receive future bulletins directly they will need to subscribe below.

Best wishes to all,

Greg Mello, on behalf of the Study Group

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