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Bulletin #98: Administration admits environmental analysis of LANL weapons facility is insufficient

September 28, 2010

In this Bulletin:

1. NNSA admits its NEPA analysis of the proposed LANL Nuclear Facility is inadequate and promises more – but continues the project anyway.
2. Other new, useful resources regarding the proposed Nuclear Facility.
3. Estimated Nuclear Facility costs now exceed \$5.5 B.
4. The White House seeks an emergency nuclear weapons spending increase to cover unexpected costs and buy Republican votes, **which would start on Friday of this week if passed**; House Republicans oppose.
5. The White House announces it will seek even greater nuclear weapons spending than before, will revise "Section 1251 report" in the fall.
6. New START ratification is a bum deal, "seven ways to Sunday."
7. Ways to be more involved.

[Acronyms defined](#)

CMRR - Chemistry and Metallurgy
Research Replacement

CR - Continuing Resolution

DOE - Department of Energy

DOJ - Department of Justice

EIS - Environmental Impact
Statement

LANL - Los Alamos National
Laboratory

NEPA - National Environmental
Policy Act

[Which will end first: consumer society, or earth's life?](#) (pdf)

(A slide show by Guy McPherson illustrating some facets of our converging crises.)

Dear friends and colleagues –

I would like to provide a short update on our activities here and ask again for your active solidarity, which we crave. Ours is a plucky and principled band of folks. It would be even better with your (greater) participation!

I would also like to remark upon the beauty of the selfless contributions many of you are making – some financial, some in other ways. *El Dorado*, the Golden Man, is never far away. The age of (re)discovery is open. Too bad Coronado took the wrong road, missing what was near. Our adventure is of another character.

Right up front, I want to flag the dangers of cynicism and withdrawal, which come

NF - Nuclear Facility

NGO - Non-governmental organization

NNSA - National Nuclear Security Administration

SEIS - Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement

START - Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty

UPF - Uranium Processing Facility

in many very deceptive flavors. We see a lot of them and expect to see more as our overall predicament becomes more obvious. Withdrawal isn't an option, as we know. If you think you can obtain enlightenment or some kind of private peace while the world burns down, I am afraid you are mistaken. That door has closed. Another has opened.

The purpose of this Bulletin is not to entertain or even to inform you. We are reporting back to you and sharing our accomplishments. We are providing a firm basis for inquiry and action, and to some of you we are providing a basis for decisions you can or must make.

In general, we are happy to provide briefings to your organization, church, group of friends, and especially your local government or tribe. Call Trish in the office at 505-265-1200.

1. NNSA admits its NEPA analysis of the proposed LANL Nuclear Facility is inadequate and promises more – but continues the project anyway.

Our September 23rd press release told the basic story ([In response to lawsuit, nuke agency admits huge plutonium bomb facility needs additional environmental analysis](#)). It contains links to a [Department of Justice \(DOJ\) letter to our attorneys](#) (pdf) and [our letter to DOJ in response](#) (pdf). These fine articles on this helpful development subsequently appeared:

- [NNSA plans new CMRR environmental analysis, but group won't drop suit](#). (pdf 179KB) *Nuclear Weapons and Materials Monitor*, Sep 27, 2010.
- [New Study of LANL Project Planned in Light of Lawsuit](#). *Albuquerque Journal North*, article, Sep 23, 2010.
- [Lab, watchdog group spar over nuclear facility, Feds urge dismissal of environment suit](#). *Santa Fe New Mexican*, article, Sep 22, 2010.

We are preparing further court submittals, as described in the above.

2. Other new and useful resources regarding the proposed LANL Nuclear Facility.

- [LANL Proposal Needs New Study](#). *Albuquerque Journal*, Willem Malten, op-ed, Sep 5, 2010
- [What's Behind the CMRR Facility & the US Nuclear Weapons Industry](#), (mpg 27.1MB) Darwin BondGraham, presentation, Aug 28, 2010 (*thanks to Robin Collier, Cultural Energy*)
- [Los Alamos Study Group files suit over LANL plutonium facility](#). (pdf 184 KB) *Nuclear Weapons & Materials Monitor*, article, Aug 30, 2010
- ["New START", the proposed CMRR Nuclear Facility and the LASG lawsuit against the DOE and NNSA](#). *Op-Ed News*, Malten, article, Aug 27, 2010
- [Shooting an Arrow at the Beating Heart of Nuclear Weapons](#). *The Faster Times*, blog, Aug 24, 2010 (also here: [Foreign Policy in Focus](#), blog, Aug 23, 2010)

One of the most useful things you can do is to work with your local governments, as some of you already are. Here are some resources you can use:

- [Sample letter to local government officials to request a new EIS for the CMRR Nuclear Facility](#). (doc), Sep 27, 2010
- [Sample letter from local government officials to request a new EIS for the CMRR Nuclear Facility](#). (doc) Sep 27, 2010

Working with local governments requires and develops at least a modicum of political skill and organization, which are necessary to address the broad range of interrelated crises we face. These crises impinge upon people where they are; they are abstract otherwise. There is no substitute for face-to-face local politics, in which we ourselves are engaged right where we live and work and raise our families. It ain't pretty, but oddly enough it appears to be less corrupt than the process of foundations implicitly allied with political parties setting large-scale agendas from afar.

All this and more has been implicit in our suggestion to work with local governments and abjure isolated endeavors, which are ineffective and easily manipulated.

3. Estimated Nuclear Facility costs now exceed \$5.5 B.

We cannot reveal our source, which we deem reliable. A highly-placed Administration source also tells us the estimated cost of the Uranium Processing Facility (UPF) now exceeds \$5.0 B. The two projects together are now estimated to cost in the neighborhood of \$11 B, unless of course they are downscaled or abandoned – which, we beg you to notice, *they sooner or later will be*. Many observers have remarked to us that they do not believe these facilities will be completed as currently designed – or if completed, operated. The question is less whether we will win but when, and what will happen to our society and to nature in the meantime.

Estimated Nuclear Facility costs have inflated by approximately a factor of 17 since 2002. The building is to be smaller, also – useful Hazard Category II lab space in the facility has declined by roughly 36% since then. Putting these together, *the cost per square foot of lab space has increased by a factor of very roughly 26 since the project was proposed* and the reasonable alternatives of the CMRR EIS were selected.

4. The White House seeks an emergency nuclear weapons spending increase to cover unexpected costs, buy Republican votes, **which would start on Friday of this week if passed**; House Republicans oppose.

Within its set of [requested Continuing Resolution \(CR\) “anomalies.”](#) (pdf) the White House has urged immediate implementation of its proposed FY2011 nuclear weapons budget increase. FY2011 starts on Friday of this week. Republicans [argue against passage](#), and so have we, in a [letter we sent yesterday](#) to the Democratic members of the House Appropriations Committee, and others. LANL and NNSA believe they can issue new contracts and begin the bidding process on others once fresh appropriations are in hand. Funding for the Nuclear Facility could more than triple on Friday.

5. The White House announces it will seek even greater nuclear weapons spending than before, will revise “Section 1251 report” in the fall.

On September 15, two days before the DOJ wrote its letter to us promising a SEIS and one day before the vote on New START ratification, Vice President Biden wrote to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee promising the Administration’s full commitment to the Nuclear Facility and other NNSA projects, acknowledging that their estimated costs have increased and promising to seek additional funding to cover those costs. Amid paragraphs of wandering prose, Biden said:

Since the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) was submitted to the Senate for advice and consent, questions posed...have highlighted...the Administration's plans to modernize the U.S. nuclear weapons complex, in particular the President's budget request for FY 2011 and projected out-year requests.... I write to assure the Committee of the Administration's strong support for this program...The FY 2011-2015 President's Budget was based on the best estimates available at that time, and reflected our assessment of necessary investments and the capacities to absorb increased funding... NNSA has used the time since the spring...to work on updating initial assumptions. We now have a more complete understanding of stockpile requirements, including the life extension program needs. Similarly, the designs of key facilities such as the Uranium Processing Facility and the Chemical and Metallurgy Research Replacement Facility have progressed...we expect that funding requirements will increase in future budget years.

Later this fall, the Administration will provide the Congress with information that updates the Section 1251 report....This Administration has expressed its unequivocal commitment to recapitalizing and modernizing the nuclear enterprise, and seeks to work with Congress on building a bipartisan consensus in support of this vital project.

These proposed increases would come *on top of* the big increases proposed earlier this year. In addition to the cost escalations Biden mentions, these promises appear to be a capitulation to Republican demands for additional nuclear weapons spending in return for possible votes in favor of New START ratification, which was the specific context in which this letter was created. (Regarding the earlier increase, see [Obama Requests Nuclear Weapons Spending Surge](#), press release, Feb 1, 2010.) Another cause: NNSA expects to subsidize corporate pension funds at its nuclear weapons sites with billions of additional dollars over the next few years to maintain the viability of those defined-benefits plans. The ultimate cost will depend on asset valuations, but this “budget bomb” isn’t going away any time soon.

6. New START ratification is a bum deal, “seven ways to Sunday.”

We are among those who do not believe New START ratification is a good idea for the foreseeable future. We laid out some of the reasons last spring in detailed correspondence to leading NGOs in the U.S. and worldwide, and continued

over the summer. New START ratification is the most important single new-term policy objective of the major arms control foundations, which largely set the agenda for most nonprofits in the field. We were not surprised to find that most nonprofits have been unable to grapple with this problem.

In early August we were pleased that a "[\[d\]elay on New START ratification vote provides opportunity for assessment of nuclear weapons policies.](#)" (press release of August 3). Darwin BondGraham has just put out a great new product on this subject, "[New START's Big Winners: U.S. Nuke Complex, Pentagon, and Contractors.](#) *Foreign Policy in Focus*, Sep 17, 2010.

You will hear more from us on this matter. There will be no vote on the treaty until, at the earliest, the lame duck session after the November elections. Despite all the hawkish promises from the Administration, passage is not assured. Whatever. Cut nuclear and military budgets, please.

7. Ways to be more involved.

[Here are some.](#)

Can we preserve the best of our civilization against the tremendous forgetting that is already cutting swathes through our culture? Can we abandon our planet-destroying fossil-fuel way of life fast enough to preserve most species -- fast enough to allow smiles to flower, not just affliction and grief, as the human population declines dramatically in the next half-century? That decline in population will happen as sure as the sun will rise tomorrow. Can we direct our declining industrial civilization into less destructive directions, and build a less destructive, more sustainable road for our children, with dignity and with more joy and less fear? We can't achieve full sustainability -- it's far too late for that -- but as was wisely said by a city official in Santa Fe, "Less bad is the new good." Since Eden, "less bad" has *always* been the proper, reality-based goal, and if we are healthy we have to fight for it. We will lose many but we can save many too.

Thank you for your attention and interest,

Greg Mello, for the Study Group

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[\[back to top\]](#)