



Los Alamos Study Group

Nuclear Disarmament • Environmental Protection • Social Justice • Economic Sustainability

November 21, 2011

Dear friends and colleagues –

I am writing to ask for your support, and that of your friends, to help us defeat the additional \$6 billion plutonium warhead production and storage building proposed for Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL).

I wrote most of you about this in August and now would like to bring you up to date on some very positive developments since then. (See the “Good News” section below). The tide is turning, in substantial part because of our work – and your support. **THANK YOU.**

What it's all about: new warheads, fiscal waste (equals private profit), and Cold War “glory” at our expense

The National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) wants to massively increase the scale and missions of its LANL plutonium complex. By far the largest new building in this plan would be the “Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement Nuclear Facility” (CMRR-NF). CMRR-NF would be the single most expensive government project ever built in New Mexico by a factor of ten. It’s two-thirds designed; construction could start next year.

NNSA says CMRR-NF will create no permanent jobs; many or most of the construction jobs will be filled by out-of-state workers. It will attract no outside capital, make no goods and provide no services, and it will educate no one.

Its primary purpose is to increase LANL’s capacity to manufacture new kinds of warhead cores (“pits”) for new kinds of warheads. It would be a multipurpose factory annex, augmenting the existing plutonium facility’s ability to ship, receive, store, and process plutonium, thus enabling greater output from the existing production line. It would help certify the products – weapons of mass destruction, just what the world needs (not) – and enable explosive plutonium tests to be conducted in large steel tanks elsewhere at LANL, the so called “subcritical tests” and “scaled experiments” considered important to deploying new warheads under the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT).

There is no need for pit production and U.S. policy does not authorize it. All U.S. pits work perfectly, alas, and will last another 80 years or more without significant degradation. There are thousands of spare pits, more even than the thousands of deployed and backup warheads. This is the original “overkill:” multiple layers of redundancy in targets, delivery systems, warheads, designs, pits, *and in plutonium storage and processing facilities*. NNSA is currently juggling *seven* of these, in *five states*. One is gradually being shuttered (at LANL); another is under construction (in South Carolina). Two more (including CMRR-NF) are in design. Meanwhile there is no production work for LANL’s existing, capable pit production line, which is housed in a facility with twice the useful space of the proposed new one.

The primary products of the new plant are thus something like these: a) a permanent new income stream for the private contractors who build and run it; b) pollution and “disenchantment” for New Mexico; and c) “protection” for the politicians who promote it – or who stand by passively like the idiot at Penn State who saw a young boy being raped but did nothing to stop it.

Los Alamos has more millionaires per capita than any other place in the U.S. This project would make many more.

Because of its great cost, and difficulty of construction on the crowded site, CMRR-NF will do nothing but harm NNSA’s national security mission until 2024. By then, assuming “success,” this facility will have consumed funding and management attention for a quarter of a century. But that will just be the beginning. At that point, NNSA can look forward to decades of increased maintenance and overhead, on the order of a quarter billion dollars annually.

There are no safety benefits from this supposedly “safer” building, because nearly all its dangerous missions are either new or bigger than those of today. Meanwhile CMRR-NF drains funds from safety improvements needed now.

The most dangerous pollution from this project is not the solid and liquid radioactive wastes which will be produced, although these are real enough and certainly eternal. The greenhouse gases to be emitted as a result of the building’s massive concrete and electricity requirements are also essentially permanent.

The most dangerous forms of pollution involved here are rather *political* and *social*. Should this huge project proceed, in the face of our intensifying fiscal, economic, social, energy and climate crises and in the face of its unresolved seismic problems and growing external criticism, it would represent a very dangerous national “doubling down” on nuclear weapons, militarism, and war.

In New Mexico we cannot afford to “double down” on our political loyalty to the nuclear and military lobbies. *Through its role in maintaining the mistaken loyalties of our congressional delegation, this project is already holding New Mexico back.* In the brave new world of climate-change-induced drought and heightened competition for renewable energy jobs, business-as-usual from our political leaders will have unacceptably dire consequences for us, considerably worse than today’s.

Should it proceed, CMRR-NF would be the dominant federal investment in this state for the crucial decade ahead. At Los Alamos, it is already drying up environmental cleanup dollars. Nationally, it is already hogging scarce resources and badly distorting priorities in the Department of Energy. It is already damaging the creation of renewable energy jobs and pumping up the political power of the nuclear contractors who already seem to have a veto over election to national office in New Mexico.

President Obama has promised literally *hundreds of billions of dollars* over the next two decades for “modernizing” U.S. nuclear weapons – and building CMRR. It won’t all happen. The degree to which this grand theft from the poor, and from our common future, takes place is going to be limited *by the determination of those who resist it*. By your determination and ours. We mustn’t be, and needn’t be, like that passive observer at Penn State.

The good news: new congressional allies, new budget constraints, and our litigation continues strongly

The impossible folly of spending hundreds of billions on modernizing the nuclear arsenal and its supporting factories, and doing it all *right now*, is beginning to sink in at the Pentagon, in Congress, and in the White House. The appropriations committees and the Government Accountability Office are waving big red flags, saying NNSA can’t build everything at once. *Most of the concern on Capitol Hill about CMRR is informed by the literally hundreds of detailed briefings we have provided over the past few years.*

In October, in an effort organized by Congressman Markey of Massachusetts, sixty-five Democrats went on record calling for cuts in nuclear weapons spending, including the termination of CMRR-NF. (We have been in close communication with that office all along.) The *New York Times* subsequently devoted a lead Sunday editorial to slashing the nuclear weapons budget, including CMRR-NF. The *Times* then published an editorial by me on this topic, which has been widely circulated (enclosed). *The American Conservative* just wrote a bang-up article on CMRR (enclosed) which will reach many Republicans, and with which we helped considerably. Our colleagues at the Project on Government Oversight (POGO) will soon publish their own report on CMRR at our urging, a project we have coached from the beginning. The Arms Control Association has written us saying they too now fully oppose CMRR-NF, a major shift by this powerful organization. *What a change a few months can make!*

With the failure (today) of the “Supercommittee” set up by the Budget Control Act, automatic cuts to the defense budget of about 9% from previous limits are now cued to begin in October. These will be attacked later, but this law immediately (this month) affects White House directions to NNSA regarding next year’s budget. The Pentagon, which transferred future funds to NNSA for CMRR-NF, must now reassess its overall priorities. *The situation is fluid.*

Our first lawsuit, even though it was ultimately dismissed, has been critically important in delaying this project a year and a quarter (so far), through the bogus “Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement” (SEIS) NNSA had to create to defend against us. NNSA’s legal “victory” was Pyrrhic, for them. And we are appealing that strange decision. Meanwhile we have filed a second lawsuit, as Judge Herrera suggested, in which we again seek to stop this project.

There are more reasons the tide is turning, but space here is limited. The project has great momentum, but frankly we are now winning. *But we just can’t do it by ourselves. We need your help!* The sooner we get it stopped, the better.

One of the biggest distractions with which all of us must deal is the upcoming 2012 election, and the “electotainment” industry in general. Both major parties work to convince political donors that these elections have real substance, that their party is worthy of major contributions, and that the election of the other party will mean the end of the world. We do not agree, and we refuse to be governed by fear. Millions of dollars go to these elections from New Mexicans, and meanwhile neither major party has advanced any agenda that has any prayer of helping New Mexico improve.

With your help we have been fighting hard and well for a different future in this state. It takes money; please help. And talk to your friends, please. Those of us “in the trenches” have no way of reaching them.

In solidarity with all of you who are working for a just and environmentally sustainable future,

Greg Mello, Executive Director, for the Los Alamos Study Group