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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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LOS ALAMOS BRACING FOR BIG CUT TO CMRR-NF IN FY2013 BUDGET REQUEST

Project on Government Oversight Recommends Killing Funding for Multi-Billion-Dollar Project

With less than a month remaining before the Obama Administration's Fiscal Year 2013 budget release, Los Alamos National Laboratory officials are bracing for what is expected to be a massive cut to its biggest project: the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement-Nuclear Facility. The multi-billion-dollar project that will replace the lab's aging Chemistry and Metallurgy Research facility has come under fire in recent months, both from Congress and from government watchdog groups like the Project on Government Oversight and the Los Alamos Study Group. Although lab and NNSA officials haven't said anything publicly about the project, lab officials are privately expecting the worst when it comes to funding for the project, which is estimated to cost between \$3.7 and \$5.8 billion. "We're not expecting funding for CMRR," one official told NW&M Monitor. "Right now, we're planning to go without."

Though the Administration's intentions are unclear, a decision to cut funding for the planned facility could allow the National Nuclear Security Administration to stagger its two biggest projects, the CMRR-NF and the Uranium Processing Facility planned for the Y-12 National Security Complex, or do away with the CMRR-NF project altogether. Either way, as a key piece of the Obama Administration's plan to modernize the nation's weapons complex and nuclear stockpile, any pullback on funding for CMRRNF would certainly draw protests from Congressional Republicans. The Administration pledged \$88 billion from FY2012 to FY2021 to maintain and modernize the complex, with construction of the CMRR-NF and UPF the centerpieces of the plan. In FY2012 budget projections, the Administration said it expected to spend \$300 million on CMRR-NF in FY2012 and FY2013, but Congress had already begun to balk at the price tag, providing just \$200 million in FY2012 with explicit instructions prohibiting the start of preliminary construction activities. Previously, the Senate Appropriations Committee had directed the NNSA to consider staggering construction of CMRR-NF and UPF. "The eventual demise of CMRR-NF has been inevitable, given its lack of justification and astronomical cost," said Greg Mello, the director of the Los Alamos Study Group. Mello's organization has parallel lawsuits that contend that NNSA hasn't fully analyzed alternatives to building CMRR-NF. "The initial costs were low-balled and unrealistic," Mello said.

With Limited Funds, a Choice

Initially estimated to cost \$375 million, the current projected price tag for the project is between \$3.7 and \$5.8 billion. A firm cost estimate for the project isn't expected until the end of this year at the earliest, and Congress recently declined to provide funding for the project to begin preliminary construction activities in Fiscal Year 2012; the facility is expected to be fully operational in 2023. The facility would provide space for analytical chemistry and vault space for plutonium storage, which would free up space in the lab's Plutonium Facility to increase the production of plutonium pits. One industry official suggested that CMRR-NF's relatively limited mission could be its downfall. "When you're talking about UPF and CMRR-NF, there's no comparison," the official told NW&M Monitor. "UPF, almost all of it is operations space and you've got to replace the 9212 complex. With CMRR-NF, there's only two programmatic operational functions—an analytical lab and vault space for plutonium. Everything else is support space, so it's not hard to see why there are questions about it."

It's unclear how the Administration will choose to pursue the project, but some industry officials have suggested that design of the facility could be completed during FY2012 with funds that have already been appropriated—and potentially used when the budget environment is more friendly. That strategy would also appear to fall in line with a "staggering" approach involving major NNSA construction work, allowing construction to begin on UPF while delaying work on CMRR-NF. Mello suggested, however, that work on the project be stopped immediately. "Assuming the current rumors are true, the main thing now is to stop additional expenditures immediately, mid-year, rather than winding down the project gradually and wasting even more money," he said. "NNSA should focus on making the existing LANL plutonium facility safe, without adding capabilities, at the same time continuing its process of abandoning CMR, which now has no remaining long-term missions."

NNSA Bracing for Budget Woes

While NNSA officials haven't said anything publicly about the project, there has been a clear indication that the FY2013 budget request would be lower than previous projections. In comments to NW&M Monitor last month, NNSA Principal Deputy Administrator Neile Miller suggested that the agency would have to

make do with less month than expected; \$7.95 billion had been projected for the weapons program a year ago. "Lots of consideration has been given now to a lot of things to try and formulate a budget at lower amounts than we planned a year ago," Miller told NW&M Monitor after her speech. "That's the Budget Control Act reality. Everyone from DoD to you name the 'D' has needed to and has been reexamining assumptions and priorities and program of work."

POGO Calls for CMRR-NF to End

Such a decision would be just what the Project on Government Oversight is recommending. Calling the project a "behemoth of overspending," the watchdog group this week urged the Administration and Congress to kill the project over concerns about its price tag and what it said were questions about its need in the current fiscal and national security environments. "This facility is a poster child for government waste," POGO Senior Investigator Peter Stockton said in a statement. "Why are we designing a multi-billion dollar facility that has no clear mission?" While breaking no new ground, POGO's report ticks off a variety of issues facing the project that have made it a potential target of budget cuts, including its ballooning cost and NNSA's spotty project management record, reductions to the nation's nuclear weapons stockpile, as well as seismic concerns related to its design. "Moving forward with CMRR-NF completely defies logic and our current budgetary realities," POGO Investigator Mia Steinle said. "It also runs contrary to U.S. nuclear strategy."

POGO suggested that given the current needs of the nation's nuclear deterrent, it was not necessary to increase pit production, which is one of the main arguments supporting the facility, and it suggested that the facility's planned mission could be performed at other facilities around the weapons complex at a much lower cost. "The fact that CMRR-NF is counter to current nuclear strategy should have been enough to halt design and construction of the facility some time ago," POGO said in the report. "Now that the U.S. budget is in such dire straits, it only makes sense to cut such an expensive project before more money is wasted."

POGO said alternatives involving the existing CMR facility, the first phase of the CMRR project—known as the Radiological Laboratory/Utility/Office Building or RLUOB—and the lab's Plutonium Facility could accommodate the missions currently planned for the Nuclear Facility, suggesting that room in the Plutonium Facility could be freed up by moving the facility's Plutonium-238 refining mission to the Savannah River Site or Idaho National Laboratory. "Given the likelihood of design and construction problems at CMRR-NF because of DOE's past problems, it is highly risky for construction to go forward," POGO said. "It is apparent that less costly alternative plans that do not involve a new building could satisfy DOE's and NNSA's needs, if only the agencies would give those plans serious consideration."

A Precedent for Abandoning Projects?

POGO also noted that there is precedent for canceling projects, noting that Congress cancelled the Clinch River Breeder Reactor, Gas Centrifuge Enrichment Plant, the New Production Reactor, and the Superconducting Super Collider, each after construction had begun. "Given the billion-dollar waste of these and other past projects, CMRR-NF doesn't seem like a promising investment," POGO said. "But, construction has not yet begun on CMRR-NF, so there is still time to avoid similar sunk costs. RLUOB's existence is not an argument for the construction of CMRR-NF. Hopefully, Congress will speak out against CMRR-NF sooner than later and save billions of dollars."

—Todd Jacobson

Nuclear Weapons & Materials Monitor • ExchangeMonitor Publications, Inc. • January 20, 2012



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Los Alamos Monitor

POGO: CMRR funding should be slashed Lab: Report raises many questions about the project

Saturday, January 21, 2012 at 2:27 pm (Updated: January 21, 5:04 pm)

The Project on Government Oversight (POGO) took a stick to the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement facility in its latest report released this week.

The main premise of the report is that Congress and the administration should stop funding of the CMRR, which is projected to cost between \$3.7 billion and \$5.8 billion.

The report came up with the following recommendations:

- The administration and DOE should cancel CMRR-NF and zero out funding for the project in the upcoming budget.
- If the administration and DOE fail to act, Congress should cancel funding for CMRR-NF in its next appropriations bill.
- NNSA should continue using existing facilities, at LANL and elsewhere, in the nuclear weapons complex to meet credible nuclear modernization requirements.
- Congress should amend Section 3114 of the Fiscal Year 2011 National Defense Authorization Act, "Notification of cost overruns for certain Department of Energy projects," to reflect the stronger provisions in the current Nunn-McCurdy Act in order to improve the oversight of major cost overruns and schedule delays at the DOE.
- Congress should require independent cost estimates of major DOE construction projects at an early milestone in those programs so there is more realism in estimating the costs of those projects.

Spokesperson Toni Chiri said the NNSA would not be commenting on the POGO report.

"Now is the time to stop the design and construction of CMRR-NF. As mounting cost estimates over the past decade have proven, the cost of this facility is likely to increase significantly before it is completed," the report states.

"... In light of the government's desire to reduce the U.S. deficit, a project of this magnitude that lacks a coherent justification is especially untenable. DOE and NNSA have failed to justify the need for an industrial-scale nuclear facility with a massive plutonium vault, particularly when the United States' demands for pit production have significantly evaporated over recent years and will likely continue to do so.

"The ratification of New START signifies a drawdown of nuclear weapons and a future that includes a smaller U.S. nuclear arsenal. Experts—many of whom are former nuclear laboratory officials—agree that the scale of CMRR-NF is not aligned with current U.S. nuclear strategy. Rather than forcing taxpayers to bear the financial burden of constructing an expensive nuclear facility with an obsolete mission, the Administration and Congress should eliminate funding for the CMRR-NF immediately."

POGO enlisted the help of Jay Coghlan of Nuclear Watch of New Mexico, Greg Mello of the Los Alamos Study Group and Nickolas Roth, the center of Arms Control and Non-Proliferation, in formulating the report.

Mello said in an email he has just returned to New Mexico after a series of meetings in Washington.

"While most of what transpired on that trip and previous ones must remain confidential, I can report that the tide within the national security branches of government has turned strongly against this project last year. That tide is now running at the full. This project now has very few remaining friends, and if present trends continue, it will end," Mello said.

Here is the executive summary of the report:

- A growing body of scientific and policy experts challenge the need for the CMRR-NF. The House Appropriations Committee recommended that construction of CMRR-NF be delayed, noting in a report for the fiscal year 2008 budget, "The CMRR facility has no coherent mission to justify it unless the decision is made to begin an aggressive new nuclear warhead design and pit production mission at Los Alamos National Laboratory."
- A former Sandia National Laboratories vice president, Bob Peurifoy, said in an affidavit about CMRR-NF, "Nowhere have I found a concise, objective description justifying its need...the Nuclear Facility might just sit there with nothing to do."
- Former chair of the State Department's Arms Control and Non-Proliferation Advisory Board and member of the highly respected JASON advisory group, Dr. Richard Garwin, said of CMRR-NF before a House appropriations committee, "I would suggest that one look at doing without the nuclear facility."
- CMRR-NF is counter to the U.S. government's commitment to shrinking its nuclear arsenal through the New START agreement and the President's strategic guidance for a "smaller nuclear force." The entire CMRR was originally supposed to cost taxpayers \$375 million, but the estimated costs for the CMRR-NF alone have now ballooned to an estimated \$3.7 billion to \$5.9 billion.
- The facility is unlikely to have any significant impact on job creation in the LANL region, creating no new permanent jobs.
- DOE and NNSA have failed to seriously consider less expensive alternatives to building CMRR-NF. They dismissed one plan largely on the basis that employees would have to "travel by vehicle" between two buildings that are about one mile apart.
- Many of the planned functions for CMRR-NF could be carried out at existing facilities in the nuclear weapons complex at a lower cost to taxpayers.
- CMRR-NF will not be fully operational until at least 2023, by which time most nuclear warheads will have gone through the Life Extension Program.

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Obama budget puts Los Alamos facility on hold

By AP | February 13, 2012

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP) — The budget proposal put forth by President Barack Obama on Monday could spell the beginning of the end for the planned construction of a \$6 billion plutonium research laboratory that critics have long billed as an unnecessary attempt to expand the nation's nuclear bomb building mission.

Obama's budget proposes putting on hold for five years plans to build the so-called Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement Nuclear Facility at Los Alamos National Laboratory, essentially saying it is not necessary.

That's what critics have been arguing years.

"It's very good news," said Greg Mello, director of the watchdog Los Alamos Study Group. "And it is [could be] part of a wider reassessment of what is truly necessary in the nuclear weapons budgets in both the Department of Energy and the Department of Defense."

Although the budget doesn't officially kill the program, Mello said the action effectively marks its demise.

"This is the end of this project," he said.

Instead, the administration's budget would fund a similar project in Tennessee. With last year's budget cutting mandate, many expected only one of the two projects could survive

DOE officials emphasized the project was deferred, not cut. Officials at the lab referred questions to Washington, where the National Nuclear Security Administration planned a Monday afternoon conference call to discuss the budget.

Lab officials have for years contended CMRR is needed to replace a 1940s-era facility that is beyond renovation yet crucial to supporting its mission as the primary center for maintaining and developing the country's stockpile of nuclear weapons. While much of the work is classified, they said the lab's mission was to do analytical work to support the nearby Plutonium Facility, or PF-4, which is the only building in the country equipped for making the pits that power nuclear weapons.

Critics, however, called it an effort by the DOE and NNSA to escalate the production of new nuclear weapons and turn what has largely been a research facility into a bomb factory. And they questioned the wisdom of continuing with the project after a 2007 seismic study showed a higher than previously known risk for a major earthquake in the area.

The Obama administration said Monday that the NNSA "has determined in consultation with the national laboratories that existing infrastructure in the nuclear complex has the inherent capacity to provide adequate support for these missions."

Mello said that's exactly what he has been arguing in two lawsuits that sought to halt construction of CMRR, contending the federal government had refused to look at alternatives despite increased seismic threats that sent the price tag soaring.

"They are choosing different alternatives for CMRR's missions — in fact, the very same alternatives we recommended," he said.

Mello said the decision will likely have little impact long-term on Los Alamos, which is the premier facility in the nation's nuclear weapons complex.

"It will mean that the CMRR construction jobs are not going to happen," he said. "It will mean that some engineers will have to

find some other work. ... But they are perfectly capable of continuing on and on and on."

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Los Alamos Monitor

CMRR to be deferred five years Lab: Critics, though, believe this marks the end of the project

By John Severance
Tuesday, February 14, 2012

The Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement Nuclear Facility (CMRR-NF) at Los Alamos National Laboratory will be deferred for at least five years, according to President Obama's FY 2013 Budget request to Congress Monday. According to the budget request, "The Administration proposes deferring the construction of the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement (CMRR) facility and meeting plutonium requirements by using existing facilities in the nuclear complex."

And what was the justification?

"The National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) has designed CMRR for the following stockpile missions: plutonium chemistry; plutonium physics; and the storage of special nuclear materials. Construction has not begun on the nuclear facility. NNSA has determined in consultation with the national laboratories that existing infrastructure in the nuclear complex has the inherent capacity to provide adequate support for these missions," the report said.

"Therefore, NNSA proposes deferring CMRR construction for at least five years. Studies are ongoing to determine long-term requirements. Instead of CMRR, NNSA will modify existing facilities and relocate some nuclear materials. Estimated cost avoidance from 2013 to 2017 totals approximately \$1.8 billion."

The report said the NNSA will maximize use of the recently constructed Radiological Laboratory and Utility Office Building that will be fully equipped in April 2012, approximately one year ahead of schedule. And NNSA also has options to share workload between other existing plutonium-capable facilities at Los Alamos and Lawrence Livermore national laboratories.

"In place of CMRR for the storage of special nuclear materials, the budget includes \$35 million to accelerate actions that process, package, and dispose of excess nuclear material and reduce material at risk in the plutonium facility at Los Alamos. If additional storage is needed, NNSA can stage plutonium for future program use in the Device Assembly Facility in Nevada.

"The Office of Secure Transportation Asset will execute shipments as needed," the report added. Critics, however, were quick to point out that it probably is the end of the CMRR project.

"It's very good news," said Greg Mello, director of the watchdog Los Alamos Study Group. "And it is part of a wider reassessment of what is truly necessary in the nuclear weapons budgets in both the Department of Energy and the Department of Defense."

Jay Coghlan, Nuclear Watch New Mexico Director said, "Now that the CMRR Nuclear Facility has been zeroed out, our New Mexican Congressional delegation and state and local elected officials should be pushing hard for comprehensive cleanup at the lab. That will create 100's of desperately-needed jobs and at the same time protect our scarce, precious groundwater and the Rio Grande. That's in stark contrast to unneeded nuclear weapons programs that produce more radioactive and hazardous wastes and creates few if any new jobs."

National Nuclear Security Administration officials emphasized the project — already plagued by years of cost overruns and delays — was delayed, not cancelled, because of a tough fiscal environment. Instead, the administration's budget funds a separate uranium facility in Tennessee.

With last year's budget cutting mandate from Congress, many expected only one of the two projects could be funded this year.

Thom D'Agostino from NNSA said in a conference call with reporters Monday that "we are not canceling the project. We are deferring the project for five years. It's a deferral."

Energy Secretary Steven Chu told reporters in Washington that the Department of Energy's decision to abandon — at least for five years — the plutonium complex proposed for Los Alamos National Laboratory came down to simple economics. Faced with escalating costs for two proposed multibillion-dollar nuclear weapons-related projects, one in Tennessee and the second at Los Alamos, the National Nuclear Security Administration was forced to choose. It chose the facility in Tennessee.

"Within these budget realities it was very clear we couldn't do both needs at the same time so we addressed the one that we thought was most critical," Chu told the Albuquerque Journal.

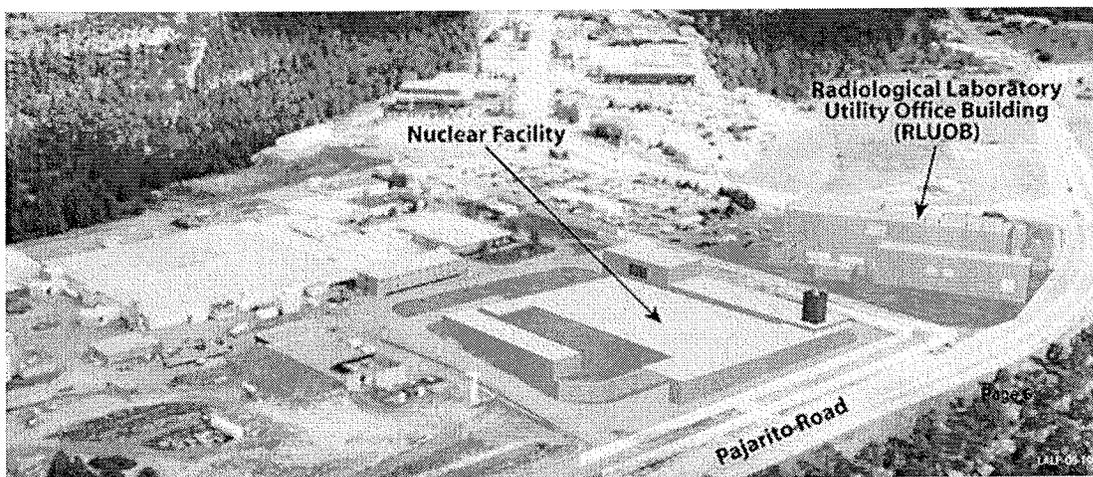
Sen. Jeff Bingaman (D-NM) added, "For years, we have been told the CMRR nuclear facility was necessary. Now we're being told there may be alternatives. I look forward to hearing more from the administration about this change in plans," Bingaman said.

Lab officials have for years contended CMRR is needed to replace a 1940s-era facility that is beyond renovation yet crucial to supporting its mission as the primary center for maintaining and developing the country's stockpile of nuclear weapons. While much of the work is classified, they said the lab's mission was to do analytical work to support the nearby Plutonium Facility, or PF-4, which is the only building in the country equipped for making the pits that power nuclear weapons. Critics, however, called it an effort by the DOE and NNSA to escalate the production of new nuclear weapons. And they questioned the wisdom of continuing with the project after recent seismic studies showed a higher than previously known risk for a major earthquake in the area.

The Obama administration said Monday that the NNSA "has determined in consultation with the national laboratories that existing infrastructure in the nuclear complex has the inherent capacity to provide adequate support for these missions." Mello said that's exactly what he has been arguing in two lawsuits that sought to halt construction of CMRR, contending the federal government had refused to look at alternatives despite increased seismic threats that sent the price tag soaring. "They are choosing different alternatives for CMRR's missions — in fact, the very same alternatives we recommended," he said.

Mello said the decision will likely have little impact long-term on Los Alamos. "It will mean that the CMRR construction jobs are not going to happen," he said.

"It will mean that some engineers will have to find some other work. ... But they are perfectly capable of continuing on and on and on."



Courtesy LANL

These were the preliminary plans back in 2006 for the Chemistry Metallurgy Research Replacement facility. The Radiological Laboratory Utility Office Building was completed, but the nuclear facility has been deferred for another five years.

- CMRR project to be deferred five years
- Obama's New Budget: the Winners and Losers
- Construction begins on TRU Waste facility

The Associated Press contributed to this story. The local reaction to the CMRR Project will be in Wednesday's Los Alamos Monitor.

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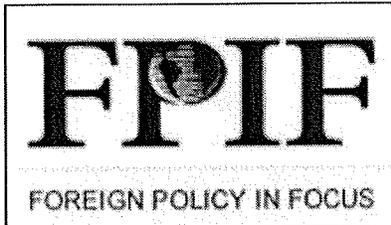
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Nuclear Pit Boondoggle at Los Alamos Temporarily Scuttled

By Russ Wellen, February 14, 2012

The new budget for fiscal year 2013 (which begins on October 1) just released, reports Chris Schneidmiller for Global Security Newswire, calls for the

Energy Department's semiautonomous National Nuclear Security Administration to receive \$11.5 billion. ... just shy of 5 percent above the amount allocated in the current budget ... The budget would provide \$7.6 billion for NNSA efforts to "maintain a safe, secure, and effective nuclear deterrent."

The other \$2.5 billion ...

... is proposed for NNSA initiatives to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and related materials. [Nonproliferation, in other words. -- RW] That amount, if approved, would constitute a \$163 million boost from the amount allocated for this year.

All in all ...

... the administration is seeking \$372 million less for weapons programs than it had anticipated requesting as of 2011.

Most encouraging of all:

The administration aims to freeze development of the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement complex at the Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico, which would conduct work on materials such as plutonium employed in the U.S. nuclear arsenal. ... Under the proposal, funding for the Los Alamos site ... estimated to cost up to \$6 ... would be cut by \$165 million and building would be pushed back by no less than five years.

This is the infamous plutonium pit -- the living, breathing heart of a nuclear warhead -- facility about which I frequently post. Much of the credit for inserting this major blip into the United States nuclear weapons-industrial complex goes to the Los Alamos Study Group (LASG). Among their protracted efforts to halt the CMRR-NF has been incessant lobbying on Capitol Hill and two separate lawsuits it has filed against the Department of Energy on the grounds that the planned facility is not environmentally safe.

Another factor in the CMRR-NF's delay is an economic climate that makes even Republicans open to the idea of defense cuts. The Pentagon, meanwhile (or elements thereof), with its unique talent for sensing the opportunity in any crisis, stands ready and willing to re-allocate money to weapons systems it can actually use, instead of just brandish (as with nuclear deterrence).

In one of its press releases on this development, LASG Executive Director Greg Mello reminds us of the extent to which the CMRR-NF is a boondoggle.

The CMRR project has been a fiasco from the get-go. In the beginning, [the National Nuclear Security Administration and the Los Alamos National Laboratory] proposed CMRR structures which even the most cursory examination revealed could never be built. The construction materials specified in environmental documents could not have built a shed, much less a fortified, seismically-sound nuclear facility to hold and protect several tons of plutonium. As the project developed, NNSA and its contractors kept the bad news from Congress, as they always do, until the last moment. ... Right now, NNSA is spending between one-half and one million dollars *per day* to design a facility which is highly unlikely to ever be built -- and if it were, much of the design would need to be redone anyway.

In the LASG's most recent bulletin, Mello also reminds us:

This is not an Obama-led "nuclear disarmament" decision. *This decision has nothing to do with disarmament.* CMRR-NF is being rejected, for now, on very strong factual and management grounds by the Pentagon, DOE, and NNSA itself, among many others.

The postponement of CMRR-NF certainly doesn't kill, but it at least clips the wings of two birds with one stone: the United States nuclear-weapons program and any future nuclear-weapons boondoggles.

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Sandia Wins, LANL Loses in Plan

By John Fleck and Michael Coleman / Journal Staff Writers on Tue, Feb 14, 2012

The Obama administration wants to spend \$3 billion on nuclear weapons work in New Mexico next year, but notably absent from its annual funding request to Congress is money for a plutonium lab at Los Alamos National Laboratory.

After spending more than \$600 million over nearly a decade without starting construction, the National Nuclear Security Administration on Monday asked Congress to indefinitely postpone work on the proposed new plutonium-handling building at LANL.

However, funding for nuclear weapons work at Sandia National Laboratories would jump 30 percent next year under the budget proposal, primarily for refurbishing aging nuclear weapons.

In other major budget requests affecting New Mexico, money for radioactive waste disposal at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant near Carlsbad would drop 7 percent while funding for environmental cleanup at Los Alamos would increase 27 percent.

The decision not to seek funding for the LANL project drew immediate questions and criticism from across the New Mexico political spectrum.

Sen. Jeff Bingaman, a New Mexico Democrat who chairs the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, said the decision runs counter to previous consensus in Washington. He's hosting a hearing on the DOE budget Thursday.

"For years we have been told the CMRR nuclear facility was necessary; now we're being told there may be alternatives," said Bingaman, who is not seeking re-election. "I look forward to hearing more from the administration about this change in plans."

Sen. Tom Udall, D-N.M., said in a statement that "both the Bush and Obama Administrations called for the CMRR to satisfy New START (nuclear arms reduction treaty) obligations and to address the growing safety issues at the 50-year-old building it's meant to replace."

"I have concerns about how this will affect the lab employees working in the outdated building and its impact on Northern New Mexico," Udall said.

"As a result of the Budget Control Act, which I did not support, funding cuts are being recommended across the government in order to meet deficit reduction targets," Rep. Ben Ray

Los Alamos nuclear weapons spending \$1.3 billion, down 7 percent from 2012. Multibillion plutonium building indefinitely "deferred" 7% WIPP nuclear waste disposal \$198 million, down 7 percent from 2012 7% Sandia nuclear weapons spending

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THE LIGHT OF NEW MEXICO

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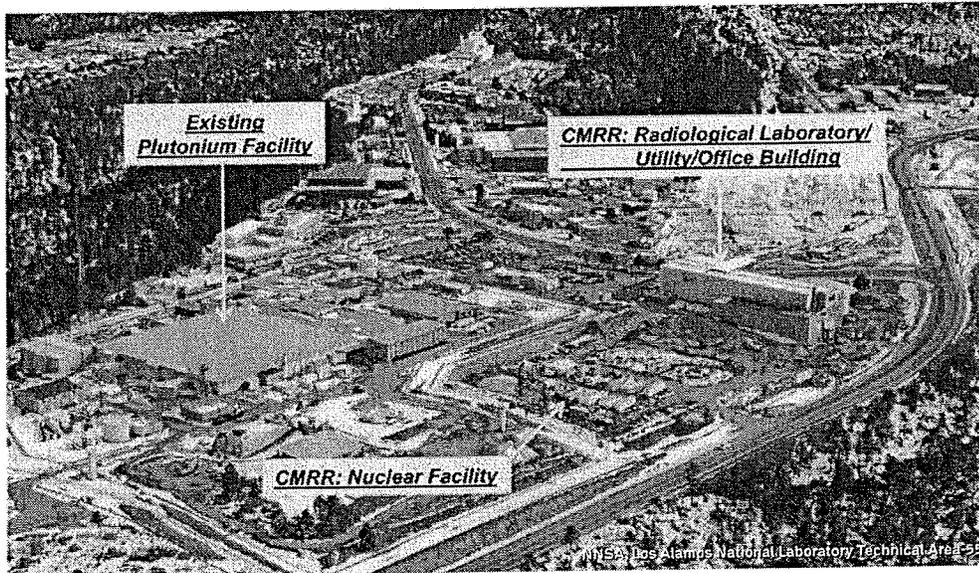
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New Mexico

The imperial overstretch of a debt-ridden empire collapses



NNSA Los Alamos National Laboratory Technical Area 55

Greg Mello, Executive Director, and Trish Williams-Mello, Operations Director, of the Los Alamos Study Group

Cut to the bone

As part of its fiscal year (FY) 2013 budget request released Monday, Feb. 13, the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) proposes to delay, "for at least five years," all spending on a proposed \$4-to-\$6 billion plutonium facility to be located in Los Alamos.

This facility, called the "Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement Nuclear Facility," or "CMRR-NF," has been the flagship U.S. nuclear warhead infrastructure project and the first priority of the NNSA's program of weapons complex modernization for the past decade. The project has been under development since 2001 and will have absorbed a total of \$994 million by the end of the present fiscal year, unless Congress halts current-year outlays. These funds have been used primarily for design, and also for construction of a multi-function support facility for the proposed new building, now indefinitely delayed.

NNSA's FY2013 Budget Request requests zero (0) dollars for this project in FY2013¹ and requests \$35 million to replace the storage functions of this facility.

Why was this "flagship" put on the back burner for five years? The obvious answers are 1) our country is broke, 2) the NNSA already has plenty of infrastructure that can be used as is or upgraded as needed to fulfill all of its missions—an alternative that the Study Group has been recommending for several years, 3) there is currently no official mission for warhead core (plutonium pit) production—the facility's core mission, 4) the chosen construction area is totally riddled with earthquake faults, as is most of Los Alamos, and 5) to comply with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty the U.S. is legally bound to decrease its nuclear weapons stockpile, not build it up. All of us here at the Los Alamos Study Group are pleased to note that the NNSA has determined, after getting hit with our two lawsuits, pressure from Congress and many others in government, that they agree with us—they have plenty of infrastructure they can utilize and they can save \$1.8 billion over the next 4 years.² The Study Group is pleased to share credit, but the real heroes in this story are the professional staff in Congress, the White House and the Pentagon, who did their jobs.

We can only hope that this about-face by the NNSA augurs a deeper programmatic reexamination and a very aggressive effort to end the poor performance by NNSA's contractors, in this case Los Alamos National Security (LANS), which

has contributed to a great waste of taxpayer money. In that light we also welcome NNSA's announcement of late last week that it would make public its Performance Evaluation Reports (PERs) of its site contractors.³ There needs to be a congressional investigation of how exactly the perennial bad management within NNSA has been allowed to persist, and what to do about it.

The CMRR project has been a fiasco from the get-go. In the beginning, NNSA and LANL—then run solely by the University of California—proposed CMRR structures which even the most cursory examination revealed could never be built. The construction materials specified in environmental documents could not have built a shed, much less a fortified, seismically sound nuclear facility to hold and protect several tons of plutonium. As the project developed, NNSA and its contractors kept the bad news from Congress, as they always do, until the last moment, which generated huge (tenfold and greater) cost increases before the design even began to firm up. At this point, after spending \$665 million on the Nuclear Facility, NNSA had not even decided which major design concept to follow—deeply buried or shallow construction—and is very far from a completed design. NNSA is spending between one-half and one million dollars per day to complete the design for this facility, which

is highly unlikely to ever be built—and if it were, much of the design would need to be redone anyway. Congress should end this unnecessary waste.

There is a dire need for a broader discussion of priorities. The United States spends far too much on nuclear weapons, not just because we have too many of them but also because our so-called "stewardship" of them has been designed to maximize, not minimize, spending in many program elements. At the labs in particular, there is abundant wasteful overhead, non-value-added work of all kinds, "vaporware" posing as science, and grandiose ideas that make no sense, of which CMRR-NF was one. In addition to this "pure" waste, there is waste associated with needless warhead modernization, which "churns" the warhead complex for highly dubious reasons. Beyond that, we have the waste embodied in superfluous warheads and delivery systems, which deliver no extra "value" even under the "nuclear deterrence" paradigm, which we believe to be destructive, absurd, and immoral in any case. This FY2013 budget is a very tentative beginning at the deeper reforms we need. Failing those reforms, the nuclear warhead enterprise will eventually suffocate from its excessive privatization and its extremely high internal rate of inflation for the actual services rendered.

Completely out of control—history in the making

In late 2001, with the events of 9/11/01 fresh on its collective mind, George W. Bush's national security team was busy. One war (in Afghanistan) was just getting going, and another (in Iraq) was on the drawing board.

This was also when the Bush administration was putting the finishing touches on a brand new plan for U.S. nuclear weapons. A bit of it was made public in January 2002, but by March shocking classified details began to emerge. Nuclear weapons, citizens learned, would not just be for "deterrence" but also for what came to be called "compellence." The nuclear arsenal would have to evolve, and promptly, to adequately project U.S. power in a dangerous post-9/11 world.

This would require a much larger production capacity than was available. The new and upgraded factories would be cornerstones in a new "capability-based deterrence," in which nuclear and non-nuclear forces were to play important roles. The capacity of the nuclear factories and labs would be so great, and the flexibility of the forces they produced so dazzling, that would-be nuclear competitors would simply give up, ceding military advantage to the U.S. Our new, more "usable" nuclear weapons and the factories that made them would awe our enemies and rivals into submission.

Call it the "Ozymandias" theory. "My

Nukes



name is Ozymandias, King of Kings/Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair."

It was nuclear "shock and awe," except that the "shock" was to be industrial, embodied in a new "responsive infrastructure" for nuclear weapons. The "shock" also would be financial, of course, and environmental, in the lucky communities chosen to host the new factories. The problem with giant new facilities for weapons of mass destruction involving highly toxic, flammable, fissile materials that had to be kept under the highest security was of course, the public. "Shock" was for enemies, not the "homeland"—especially during the environmental review process, which provides at least some limited opportunities for litigation.

Particular urgency was attached to establishing a new factory to make plutonium cores for warheads—"pits." Insufficient pit production capacity was the single biggest perceived bottleneck by the NNSA since the raid and closure of the Rocky Flats Plant in Colorado in 1989.

By mid-2002 two parallel efforts were underway to fix this. The first involved repurposing an existing proposal to replace a large, old nuclear facility at Los Alamos called the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research (CMR) Building. The original idea, hatched in 1999, was to replace CMR with a lab limited to less than 900 grams of plutonium. Senator Bingaman's

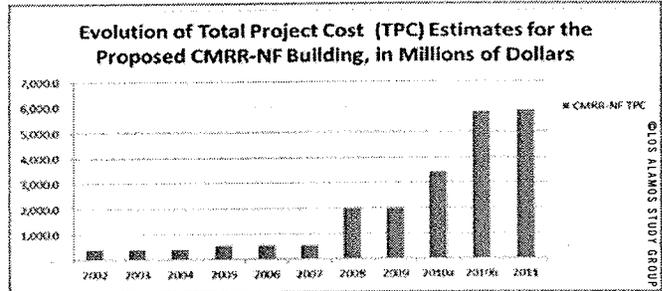
spokesperson said at the time that the new lab "would not be a 'Taj Mahal' but a scaled-down, streamlined facility that would meet the needs of the lab at a lower cost than they are met now."

But the Bush nuclear planners thought on a different scale altogether. They took this "Replacement" project, now christened "CMRR," and turned it into a plan for a huge plutonium building with twice LANL's existing processing area—tripling that space. It would hold six metric tons of plutonium, enough to remake all the strategic warheads in the U.S. arsenal today. According to one NNSA official, it "will have the plutonium stores for the Nation."⁷⁴ Much like a mythical dragon's hoard.

The total cost of the early, non-"Taj Majal" project was, in 2001, a cool \$375 million, which seemed large enough at the time. By 2004 the cost had risen to \$600 million. We didn't notice that the combination of falling space and rising cost had already jacked up the cost of useful space by a factor of four, in hindsight a portent of much larger increases to come. In 2005, the estimated total CMRR cost rose again to \$838 million. Fast-forward to November 2010 and the costs for the CMRR-NF had risen to an estimated \$3.7 to \$5.9 billion. The higher, more credible estimate is 15 times the cost estimated in 2001.

The other 2002 plan to make pits was called the "Modern Pit Facility" (MPF).

The story of CMRR is ... the slow-motion collapse of imperial overstretch in nuclear weapons, a clear-cut case of neoconservative ideology running into limits set by management competence and contractor greed, geology and geography, and the limits of public finance of a debt-ridden empire.



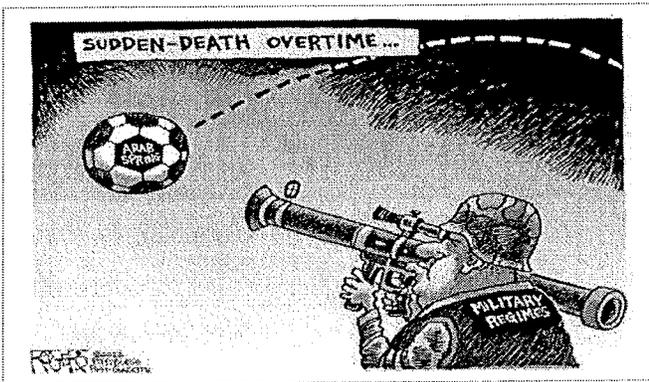
Unmistakably, MPF was what it was, and it quickly became a magnet for opposition to über-hawkish Bush nuclear policies and was finally killed.

The CMRR-NF was to be far from the benign facility as it was described in the 2003 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)—supposedly having no signifi-

cant environmental impacts of any kind. The NNSA ignored our pleas to examine cheaper and safer alternatives, to reexamine the seismic situation, to reexamine the underlying purpose and need of the facility, and so on.

Already in 1997, the Study Group
Continued on page 24

ROB ROGERS |



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Nukes



continued from page 11

had prepared a review of existing LANL seismic data, showing far greater hazard than was admitted—or, as DOE's reaction showed, understood—at the time. Curiously, the 2003 CMRR EIS was based on an obsolete, highly optimistic analysis from 1995 that had been severely criticized by LANL's peer reviewers. It was precisely the rejection of that early, over-optimistic seismic picture which had been the *raison d'être* for the CMRR project in the first place. In 2007 LANL and its consultants published an updated seismic analysis based on long-standing LANL research, showing significantly greater accelerations and earthquake frequencies than previously admitted—as great as those experienced at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear facility, or even greater.

The bigger part of the project went underground—both figuratively, and as we later learned, literally as well. A support building—the Radiological Laboratory, Utility, and Office Building (RLUOB)—was designed and its construction began. All RLUOB's labs combined were to contain less than nine grams of plutonium. In terms of radiological protection this is not so very different than a hospital, or ordinary college lab. The larger nuclear facility was quietly under design—and in all its aspects, including any problems, quite secret.

Meanwhile, back in Washington, the House of Representatives was never happy about this project. For five years, starting in 2004, House Appropriators saw a train wreck coming and tried to kill this project but were overruled each time by an inflexible Senate Appropriations Committee, whose lead negotiator on nuclear issues was Sen. Pete Domenici, a senator who never saw a radionuclide—or pork barrel project for New Mexico—he didn't like.

The story of CMRR is an important story of the slow-motion collapse of imperial overstretch in nuclear weapons, a clear-cut case of neoconservative ideology running into limits set by management competence and contractor greed, geology and geography, and the limits of public finance of a debt-ridden empire. Not just CMRR but also the entire thrust of ambition in nuclear weapons that has been demanded by neoconservatives and the nuclear contractor spokespersons in Congress are now failing. ☪

¹ Department of Energy, National Nuclear Security Administration, *FY 2013 Congressional Budget Request*, February 2012, Vol. 1, 188.

² *Ibid.*, 185.

³ ExchangeMonitor Publications and Forums, Weapons Complex Morning Briefing, Feb 13, 2012.

⁴ Donald Cook, Deputy Administrator for Defense Programs, NNSA, Testimony, Senate Armed Forces Subcommittee, March 30, 2011: "... it's not only a facility we're putting in place for actinide research and development, but will have the plutonium stores for the Nation."

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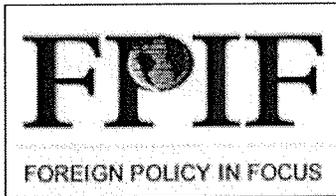
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Low Tax Rates for the Rich Harm Not Only the Economy, But Defense

By Russ Wellen, February 16, 2012

As regular readers know, we've been tracking the progress of the design and construction of a new nuclear facility (the CMRR-NF) at Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico. As we posted yesterday ... Nuclear Pit Boondoggle at Los Alamos Temporarily Scuttled due to a combination of the economic climate and the efforts of the Los Alamos Study Group (LASG), which has been educating the public, lobbying Washington, and filing two suits to halt the CMRR-NF on environmental grounds.

But sociologist Darwin BondGraham, who is on the LASG Board of Directors, is in no mood to gloat about the victory. In an elegiac article for Counterpunch titled Starving the Real Beast, he writes

The war machine has begun to eat itself for the sake of preserving hyper-inequalities resulting directly from the less progressive tax code instituted a decade prior, and the multitude of shelters capital now hides behind.

See what he's saying here? By paying minimal taxes, the rich and corporations are depriving the nuclear-weapons program and defense in general of funds (or forcing their reallocation from budget needs other than defense). In other words, BondGraham is providing progressives with a stunning talking point -- one seldom seen (never, in my case). It might be worded something like this: When the corporate rich don't pay their fair share of taxes, it leaves us more vulnerable to attack. (Not that we necessarily have to believe the last part.) BondGraham again (emphasis added):

Whether the Right realizes their folly at this point is not yet clear. After a decade of record breaking tax cuts for the wealthy, and economic deregulation ... leading to explosive inequality and a historic crash of over-leveraged and debt ridden markets, the American plutocracy has not only [driven] millions into poverty, they have now gone so far as to undermine the budgetary and organizational basis of the military establishment upon which a larger global system of inequality, which they benefit from, rests.

Yes, you read that right. As well as putting the nation in harm's way (theoretically) they're undermining the security of their own enterprises. But less and less moored to the United States and able to afford their own security, perhaps that's their plan.

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SANTA FE NEW MEXICAN.com

LANL seeks to shed up to 800 jobs

By Roger Snodgrass | For The New Mexican

2/21/2012



Photo by: photo courtesy of Los Alamos National Laboratory

Los Alamos National Laboratory plans to reduce its workforce by 400 to 800 employees this spring through voluntary buyouts.

In an all-hands meeting Tuesday, LANL Director Charles McMillan outlined a "voluntary separation program" that avoids forced layoffs.

The plan must be approved by the National Nuclear Security Administration.

"If enough people participate, we feel better about not having to do something involuntary," McMillan said.

According to lab spokesman Fred deSousa, McMillan emphasized that the process was voluntary. "He said nobody can volunteer you. Your manager can't volunteer you," deSousa said after the meeting.

Lab officials blamed new budget realities for the cost-cutting initiative, noting that the annual budget for the current fiscal year falls about \$300 million short of last year's total -- \$2.2 billion compared to \$2.5 billion in fiscal year 2011. About \$240 million of the shortfall is in the weapons program, including \$140 million specifically related to nuclear weapons. Another \$60 million is attributed to a decline in work for others, mostly other national security agencies. To make matters more difficult, yearly attrition rates have been lower than average for the last three years, and future budgets are not expected to increase, according to laboratory projections.

The LANL announcement came after the Obama administration announced last week that it planned to defer for at least five years construction of a controversial \$6 billion plutonium research lab at Los Alamos. Construction had been expected to begin this year on the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement Nuclear Facility.

County officials said they were told the deferment would result in a loss of 1,000 planned construction jobs.

As of Tuesday, the laboratory counted a total workforce of 11,127 permanent employees of the managing contractor Los Alamos National Security. Of those, 9,585 were in the group targeted for

reductions. The reductions will not affect unionized workers or students, although the number of students at the lab will be capped at 2011 levels. At present, a so-called "flexible workforce" of 1,134 employees would not be subject to the reduction, although that possibility hasn't been ruled out, McMillan said.

An employee subject to a voluntary reduction would receive a "standard severance package," which is based on years of service and a set of terms that will need to be approved by the NNSA, which oversees the nuclear weapons complex.

Anticipating narrow financial straits ahead, the lab formed a panel of senior managers late last year to study alternatives.

A similar program of voluntary reduction was successful in 2008, the last time the workforce was at risk. At that time, the laboratory sought reductions of 450 to 750 employees, and received 430 eligible applicants. Combined with a group of 140 employees who left their jobs by natural attrition, the outcome was sufficient to avert involuntary cuts. Those cuts were necessitated by approximately \$176 million in extra costs that were added to the lab's budget, including new state and local gross-receipts taxes, additional fees to the management company, and new salaries and employer-paid benefits.

In ensuing years, according to recent congressional testimony by former LANL Director Michael Anastasio, new annual costs related to the for-profit contract rose by more than 10 percent of lab's budget. Anastasio expressed concern that "a new age of austerity" would have a significant impact on sustaining "high quality science, engineering and mission effectiveness in the nuclear security enterprise."

U.S. Sen. Tom Udall, D-N.M., said he was concerned about the impact that budget cuts would have at the lab.

"LANL is critical to our national security and state's economy and I will continue to push for adequate funding at both of New Mexico's national labs," Udall said in a statement.

The watchdog Los Alamos Study Group hailed the development, saying it would help restrain excessive growth and much higher salaries for managers and scientists compared to counterparts in other federal departments and laboratories.

"We believe weapons laboratory salaries and benefits should be brought down toward federal levels, starting at the top, and LANL should become a narrowly focused federal nuclear laboratory," said Greg Mello, executive director of the group.

As is almost always the case, the laboratory meeting was closed to non-badge-holders, including the press.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

McMillan said details of the separation packages would not be disclosed until the plan is approved.

Los Alamos lab to cut up to 800 employees

This story was published Wednesday February 22nd 2012

By The Associated Press

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. -- The nation's premier nuclear facility unveiled plans Tuesday to shed as many as 800 employees, or almost 10 percent of its regular permanent work force, as it faces a \$300 million budget cut this year.

Los Alamos National Laboratory said it has submitted a plan to reduce its regular full-time staff of 7,585 by between 400 and 800 this spring through "a voluntary separation program." It also employs more than 3,000 contractors, students and other lab workers but they would not be affected "at this time," a spokeswoman said.

Lab Director Charlie McMillan said plans to offer voluntary buyouts are part of "an attempt to reduce the risks of involuntary layoffs."

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Albuquerque Journal (New Mexico)

Distributed by McClatchy-Tribune Business News

February 22, 2012 Wednesday

Albuquerque Journal, N.M., Jackie Jadrnak column

BYLINE: Jackie Jadrnak, Albuquerque Journal, N.M.

SECTION: STATE AND REGIONAL NEWS

LENGTH: 955 words

Feb. 22--About 400 to 800 workers will be leaving Los Alamos National Laboratory this spring -- preferably by their choice, the lab announced Tuesday.

Lab Director Charlie McMillan told workers during a meeting in a packed auditorium that the staff reduction plan has been sent to the National Nuclear Security Administration for approval, calling it a "voluntary separation program."

This reduction will be taken from the 7,585 permanent employees at LANL, amounting to a 5 to 11 percent cut, according to spokesman Fred deSousa. It will not affect students, post-doctoral, term or union workers, he said, noting that those groups bring LANL's total current employment to 11,127 people.

The labs' employees are among the highest paid in the state, and such cuts are expected to be a blow to the state's economy, particularly in northern New Mexico.

But Sen. Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M., while applauding the lab's workforce and role, noted that a growing federal debt necessitates belt tightening.

"Given the amount of federal resources New Mexico receives, austerity is unfortunately going to affect our state," he said via email.

The lab's budget for the current fiscal year, at \$2.2 billion, is \$300 million lower than the previous year, and no growth is expected in future budgets, according to its official news release.

"We are taking these actions now in an attempt to reduce the risks of involuntary layoffs," said McMillan in a news release. "When combined with a suppressed attrition rate for the past three years, our current budget and future outlook require significant cost cutting."

Despite the staff cutbacks, no plans are in place for any of the lab's programs to be reduced or eliminated, deSousa said. Also, he added that jobs critical to the lab's national security mission will not be cut.

Employees will be offered severance packages based on their years of service, he said, while adding that details won't be available until the NNSA approves the proposal. The actual number of final staff cuts may depend on how many employees voluntarily leave, deSousa said, noting that further actions won't be considered until that is known.

Reaction to the staff reductions was mixed Tuesday.

"LANL is critical to our national security and state's economy and I will continue to push for adequate funding at both of New Mexico's national labs," Sen. Tom Udall, D-N.M., said in an email.

Scott Darnell, spokesman for Gov. Susana Martinez, said the governor is concerned about the potential effect of the cuts on the economy of northern New Mexico.

"She also believes these cuts are yet another by-product of the dysfunction in Washington, D.C., and the inability to appropriately prioritize national defense and national security in federal spending decisions," Darnell said via e-mail.

Jon Barela, secretary of the state's Economic Development Department, said he expects local small businesses to feel the impact of the cuts.

"It means people will be selling their homes, will not be purchasing goods and services in the area," he said.

Greg Mello, director of the Los Alamos Study Group, a lab critic, called the planned workforce reduction good news, saying, "The post-Cold-War nuclear weapons missions at LANL have grown much too much over the past 17 years. Not only have the missions grown, but so has the cost per scientist."

"As a nation we must radically change priorities toward ambitious, effective policies and programs that address the mounting ecological, social, and economic problems we face," Mello said in a news release. "LANL is not the place for that new work."

The job-cut announcement comes on the heels of a federal decision to indefinitely defer construction of a new plutonium laboratory at LANL. Once construction began, the project would have provided 420 construction jobs, according to a federal project study. According to deSousa, money already budgeted for the project will be spent this year to complete design work, and most employees involved in that work were deployed from other sections of the lab and will be reabsorbed into the workforce.

Sharon Stover, chairwoman of the Los Alamos County Council, said of the cutback, "It's disappointing because last year we were told that these missions were key to the defense of our country. I'm not sure what's changed in the last few months, but we have a delegation that is going to D.C. next month. ... We hope our congressional leaders can get us some answers and reverse the trend."

But Congressman Ben Ray Lujan, D-N.M., whose district includes Los Alamos, said federal budget cuts are under way to reduce the deficit.

"Los Alamos National Laboratory is not immune from these cuts in the President's budget, and this will no doubt have an impact on jobs in New Mexico," he said in an email.

"By focusing our efforts on expanding LANL's mission, as a recent National Research Council report recommends, we will better insulate the lab from future cuts by attracting new opportunities from diverse funding sources and keeping more jobs at Los Alamos," he added.

With 40 percent of LANL's workforce living in Los Alamos County, maintaining the health of the lab is the county's No. 1 goal for economic vitality, Stover said.

The lab last offered buyouts in 2008, when 431 out of 8,110 regular permanent employees volunteered to leave.

"We were successful when we took similar action in 2008," McMillan said. "I am fully aware of the economic footprint this lab has in northern New Mexico, and we're taking every possible step to minimize the impacts."

The Associated Press contributed to this story.

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Global Security Newswire

Daily News on Nuclear, Biological & Chemical Weapons, Terrorism and Related Issues

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Los Alamos Lab Plans Major Staffing Reduction

Feb. 22, 2012

The Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico on Monday said it is planning a "voluntary separation program" aimed at cutting personnel by 400 to 800 staffers (see [GSN](#), Feb. 21).

"We are taking these actions now in an attempt to reduce the risks of involuntary layoffs," laboratory Director Charlie McMillan said in a press release. "When combined with a suppressed attrition rate for the past three years, our current budget and future outlook require significant cost-cutting. The plan we're submitting will position the lab to continue executing our missions today and in the future."

The move is necessitated by a \$300 million drop in this year's budget, from \$2.55 billion in fiscal 2011 to \$2.2 billion, and the expectation that subsequent appropriations would leave the laboratory with an equal or smaller amount of funding, McMillan told laboratory staffers.

The National Nuclear Security Administration, which oversees the facility, must sign off on the proposal (Los Alamos National Laboratory [release](#), Feb. 21).

Los Alamos houses both nonproliferation and atomic arms activities, including production of plutonium cores for nuclear weapons.

"LANL is critical to our national security and state's economy and I will continue to push for adequate funding at both of New Mexico's national lab[s]," the Associated Press quoted Senator Tom Udall (D-N.M.) as saying in prepared comments.

Countered Greg Mello, head of the watchdog Los Alamos Study Group: "The post-Cold War nuclear weapons missions at LANL have grown much too much over the past 17 years. Not only have the missions grown, but so has the cost per scientist" (Jeri Clausing, Associated Press/[The Republic](#), Feb. 21).

The laboratory presently has 11,127 permanent staffers, but the separation plan would cover only 9,585 members of the work force, the Santa Fe [New Mexican](#) reported (Roger Snodgrass, [New Mexican](#), Feb. 21).

Tags

- [Nuclear Weapons Complex](#),

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The Santa Fe New Mexican (New Mexico)

March 10, 2012 Saturday

LOS ALAMOS NATIONAL LABORATORY; ACTIVIST'S WORK PAYS OFF WITH PROJECT'S DELAY

BYLINE: Roger Snodgrass/For The New Mexican

SECTION: MAIN; Pg. A-1

LENGTH: 2225 words

On a fateful evening two years ago, Greg Mello drove from his home in Albuquerque to Los Alamos to attend a public meeting on a nuclear construction project called the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement.

Mello listened with growing alarm as Los Alamos National Laboratory officials gave a routine description of extraordinary changes for the nuclear facility, the proposed plutonium handling-and-processing center at Los Alamos National Laboratory.

"I didn't have goose bumps -- but it was like that," said Mello, director of the Los Alamos Study Group. "It was obvious that this project was in trouble and legally vulnerable. It so vastly exceeded the project they had described in 2003 -- same place, same function, but 100 times the concrete. It was something out of Dr. Strangelove. It was absurd, and we thought others would see it that way."

It turns out that Mello was right: The design changes, the questions about safety and most of all, the increased costs, prompted nuclear weapons officials to postpone the project for at least five years when President Barack Obama released his federal budget document on Feb. 13.

Though the move has resulted in lost dollars and jobs for Northern New Mexico, the delay represented a lifetime of education and activism for Mello, an engineer by training, an environmentalist by heart.

"Without the lawsuit, the nuclear facility would have already been under construction," Mello said. "All that was lacking was a piece of legislation with the word 'construction' in it, and they would never have stopped."

Earthquake issues, rising costs

At the heart of the delay were escalating costs for the project, problems aggravated by new concerns about seismic activity in light of the nuclear accident at Japan's Fukushima plant.

The Los Alamos project costs had swelled from an original cost of \$375 million to as high as \$4 billion. Based on new studies about earthquake probabilities, officials described a far larger project that would require an extraordinary concrete foundation, hundreds of thousands of tons of sand and coarse aggregate, cement batch plants, a road realignment, fleets of trucks, far more structural steel, much heavier energy and water usage and added air pollution.

Among those attending the meeting, David McCoy, executive director of Citizen Action in Albuquerque, was also alarmed. "It seems to me when you are talking about excavating this large volume of material, it seems you are basically changing designs," he said during a question-and-answer period.

The environmental impacts for the huge project were analyzed in 2003, but barely updated since then despite dramatic changes in scale. To Mello, it was like someone was driving a double-trailer semi-truck loaded with nuclear bombs on an expired motorcycle driver's license. It became obvious to him that LANL, with all the changes, was not in compliance with

the National Environmental Policy Act.

In the days after the meeting, Mello began searching for legal representation and within a few weeks he found Tom Hnasko, whom he had faced on the other side of the fence in a previous lawsuit. The team grew to include Lindsay Lovejoy Jr., a former assistant attorney general of the state of New Mexico with expertise in nuclear issues, and Diane Albert, a former staff member at LANL who was once a county councilor in Los Alamos, now an intellectual property lawyer in Albuquerque.

With the help of its legal team, the study group filed a lawsuit on Aug. 16, 2010, asking a federal court in Albuquerque to prohibit further work on the project until a new full-fledged environmental impact statement was done.

On Oct. 1, 2011, the Department of Energy and the National Nuclear Security Administration announced plans to prepare a supplemental analysis, an abbreviated environmental review that the study group quickly dismissed as inadequate. The defendants agreed not to begin construction until a formal record of decision was reached. That document was issued on Oct. 13.

Meanwhile, on May 23, U.S. District Judge Judith Herrera decided against intervening in the dispute while the supplemental environmental analysis was under way. Regardless of the outcome, the immediate significance of the lawsuit was that it delayed construction for another year, by which time the economy and federal budget deficits were beginning to influence nuclear weapons decisions.

Mello: The inside game

Mello, a Buddhist devotee with a lifelong mission to abolish nuclear weapons, is the first to say his role in the apparent demise of CMRR was a matter of luck and timing.

Other individuals in his own organization; his wife and operational right arm, Trish Williams-Mello; and board members Peter Neils, a folk singer and woodworker in Albuquerque; and Willem Malten, a Santa Fe baker, were especially important to what was an even more complex strategy than a dilatory legal case.

Mello, 62, was born in Ukiah, Calif. His father worked in the building industry, including a stint at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory. Greg Mello got his bachelor's degree in engineering from Harvey Mudd College in Claremont, Calif., where he developed an interest in technology policy and what he called "a strong sense of social responsibility."

He went on to earn a master's degree in urban planning as a Housing and Urban Development Fellow at Harvard University.

When he first came to Northern New Mexico, Mello lived in Los Alamos, which reminded him of Livermore. "People don't know what Los Alamos was like in the '70s, when the humanist spirit was strong, if not dominant," he said. "Little did we know that the world and that tradition was so fragile."

He became involved in various ways with the environmental movement. He worked with Bill Lumpkins, the Santa Fe architect-artist in a campaign to preserve Paseo de Peralta from becoming a four-lane road on the east side, which would have meant the demolition of the houses on the inside of the loop.

His first job in Santa Fe was as an intern with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Later, he would work as a hazardous waste inspector at the New Mexico Environment Department in Gov. Toney Anaya's administration, initiating regulatory action against Department of Energy facilities.

The strongest influence on his decision to take on disarmament as a mission, he said, were his Zen teachers, Philip Kapleau and Robert Aitken. Kapleau had been the chief court reporter at the Nuremberg and Tokyo war crimes trials. Aitken was a socialist and anarchist. They instilled "a responsibility to step forward and act ethically in the world," Mello said.

A catalyzing moment came for him with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

"I realized that the Cold War and the arms industry represented a menace to our civilization, and I recognized that it was important to speak up before the moment had passed," he said.

An informal study group opened a dialogue with the Los Alamos community. Later, Mello decided to take his savings and bankroll the Los Alamos Study Group. He rented his house and lived in an office at the corner of Grant Avenue and Catron

Street in Santa Fe. In 2003, Mello and his wife moved to Albuquerque.

Financially, the Los Alamos Study Group survives from small donations and constant fundraising. In 2010, it raised \$70,000 and in 2011 it raised \$120,000. Gross salaries were \$32,500 last year; operating expenses were \$30,000 for travel, office costs and communication and \$10,000 for health insurance.

"It's a white-knuckle operation," Mello said.

It is difficult to trace the cause and effect of individual actions or weigh the significance of Mello's many trips to Washington since 2006.

"It's a huge challenge, facing a large, entrenched bureaucracy, with an enormous amount of money sunk into past decisions," said Charles Perkovich, president of the Federation of American Scientists, who has a security clearance from Sandia National Laboratories.

Among other matters, his organization keeps a wary eye on nuclear weapons issues.

Perkovich is especially impressed with what he called Mello's "strange bedfellows" coalition. "Greg was able to reach out to people in the Republican camp who could see the issue as a budgetary matter," he said. "My understanding is that he was able to tap into that and things fell into place in terms of mounting national debt, and enough Republicans found that kind of argument persuasive."

For some years now, Mello has found himself up against not just a nuclear weapons laboratory but the entire nuclear weapons complex. While he was trying to stop what he considered an unnecessary boondoggle, most of the arms control and disarmament community was backing the president's decision to modernize the nuclear enterprise over the next 10 years.

Against the grain, Mello argued that the modernization program, an expanding pit-making capacity and an accelerated life extension program for much of the existing nuclear stockpile were not necessary. An ample supply of the nuclear triggers and a surplus of nuclear weapons already were on hand, he said, and there were more urgent national needs.

"We don't want to shut the laboratory down," Mello said. "We want to walk back down the limb we got ourselves out on with nuclear weapons. We don't want a nuclear facility because these missions need to be minimized, not maximized. We want the plutonium facility that is already there to be safe and no bigger than today, because we are going to need a plutonium facility for the foreseeable future."

A Washington policy analyst who follows the budget process described Mello as a one-stop resource for anyone opposed to the CMRR, or alternatively, for those simply interested in learning about the issue.

"He certainly knows a huge amount, more than anyone working against it. No one else comes close," said the analyst.

"Greg has always been one of the few people that has consistently tried to put nuclear policy in the broader context of what kind of a civilization America is becoming," said University of Chicago professor Joseph Masco, author of *Nuclear Borderlands*, which examines the post-Cold War culture and the phenomenon of nuclear weapons as a national fetish. The book focuses on Los Alamos and features Mello's work, among others, in encouraging the emergence in New Mexico of an anti-nuclear complex that could challenge the nuclear complex.

"In terms of his tactics and his specific long-term perspective on the social effects of the bomb on American society, Greg has made a significant contribution to a peace complex," Masco said.

Following quickly on the news that CMRR construction would be put on hold came word that LANL's budget would be \$300 million less next year. Lab managers announced plans to begin a voluntary employee separation program in order to trim as many as 800 jobs -- 10 percent of the permanent workforce.

Apart from the question of nuclear disarmament, Mello said, it's a positive step from the point of view of sound government.

"There are too many nuclear weapons jobs. Los Alamos National Security, the managers and LANL are too big; people in general make too much money there," he said.

The case that Los Alamos produces economic development in Northern New Mexico has never been proven, he said. "Can

you imagine what the state would look like today if our congressional delegation had worked as hard to build education as they have to protect the nuclear weapons business?"

CMRR: Key dates

1989: CMRR precursor, the

Special Nuclear Materials Research and Development

Center, is proposed with a budget of \$380 million. At the time, it was the largest construction project in the history of Los Alamos National Laboratory.

1990: Greg Mello-organized campaign

with Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety derails the special nuclear materials center with public meetings, publicity and a postcard campaign to U.S. Sen. Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M.

1992-2001: Various upgrades proposed

for the aging Chemistry and Metallurgy Research building.

1998: Seismic fault discovered under the old Chemistry and Metallurgy Research building. New push to replace it begins, although it continues to be used today.

1999: New CMRR project proposed.

2001: Total project cost estimated at \$260 million.

2002: CMRR total project cost estimate raised to \$408 million.

2002: Mello studies pit production for one semester at Princeton University.

2003: Environmental impact statement on CMRR begins.

2004: Record of decision authorizing CMRR.

2005: CMRR-NF total estimated cost increased to \$567 million.

2006: Construction begins on the Radiological Utility Office Building, the first and smaller of the two CMRR buildings.

2008: U.S. Sen. Pete Domenici retires, having succeeded in saving the CMRR project from House opposition since 2003. Cost estimates now up to \$2 billion.

2010: March meeting inspires Los Alamos Study Group legal intervention. Court case begins. Estimate of total CMRR cost is \$3.4 billion and goes up again by the end of the year to \$5.8 billion.

2011: Lawsuit dismissed, giving rise to an appeal and a new case. A House-approved provision bars funding for construction in FY 2012 and is accepted by the Senate.

2012: CMRR construction is dropped from President Barack Obama's proposed budget. Officials call it a five-year deferral that will save \$1.8 billion as they study how to accomplish the plutonium storage-and-handling needs with existing facilities.

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Valley's Long Term Job Answers Don't Lie on the Hill

Print Page

By R. Braiden Trapp

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Before anyone else jumps on a jet to Washington D.C., let's all relax, get comfy and take a look at what employment information has come out of Los Alamos National Laboratory in the past month. It's not great news but it's also not chicken little time.

To begin, let's admit we're not special. Well, we're special in that New Mexico is number five in the country when it comes to more federal dollars flowing into the state versus what businesses and individuals send to Washington. That's nice for us when the economy is humming along. It's bad for us when the government starts looking at everyone's allowance.

The federal budget is getting cut all over the nation, hence the term federal. In that regard, we're not special. New Mexico and all of the labs are part of those cuts. We don't get a pass because we're more dependent on the Lab than other communities are on their government teat.

The Lab has suffered from what many past lab directors have testified in Washington as overly strict management since the 2005 reorganization. It went to a for-profit consortium and while Uncle Sam was ready to pay more money for better security and accountability, he's not getting it, according to many past directors. He's just lining private companies' pockets as they cut science to make more profit.

So Uncle isn't enamored with the Lab like he once was. So the Lab's 2013 budget got cut \$300 million and when the Lab came up with a \$5 to \$6 billion price tag for a \$300 million project, it got put on the back burner.

But let's start with the overall reduction in force the Lab announced a month ago. They're looking to cut 400 to 800 jobs by encouraging people to retire. They've already hit the 400 mark and that could go higher. They're accepting voluntary retirements until April 5. No one has said layoffs are coming next or what the next step is in reducing their labor force.

These aren't lost incomes. They're a different kind of income. What once was a salary, now is a retirement check. A lot of these retirement checks will be much higher than the average wage in Rio Arriba County.

And not all 400-800 people are from the Valley. Looking at it statistically, about 20 percent of them may be from here.

The Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement Nuclear Facility is a different kind of employment story. The number politicians like to banter about is 1,000 and they're "lost jobs."

They're not. Speaking to the communications folks at the Lab, there would be an average of 1,000 people employed sporadically over 10 years. There would be an ebb and flow of an average of 420 carpenters, truck drivers, electricians, masonry people and other trades moving through the project as their expertise was needed.

So it's not 1,000 jobs lost. It's 1,000 people who would work for an undetermined period of time sometime in the next 10 years.

Realistically, some of the people who would have worked those jobs are in elementary school right now so it's not like all the unemployed trades people in Rio Arriba County could line up for a job immediately following the ground-breaking ceremony.

Lastly, all those jobs were not going to be filled by Rio Arribans. There are other places near the Lab with trades people out of work too. Again, we're not special.

The easiest way to look at these numbers is to go to the National Nuclear Security Administration web site or the Lab web site. Don't try talking to a Lab communications person. They speak in guarded, defensive tones. It's clear they're spinning as much as they can and you have to drag information out of them.

So before everyone does the "sky is falling" dance, please remember about 90 percent of the County IS employed. We're working every day and many are spending money in Rio Arriba County, as far as meager local services will allow. According to the state labor department, 7.2 percent are unemployed but for most of that 7.2 percent, the answer was not and is not at the Lab.

The answer lies in expanding our current economic base and changing the dynamic that places us so squarely dependent on out of control bureaucrats 20 miles away. That's going to take cooperation between pueblos, the city of Española, Rio Arriba County, the school districts, Northern New Mexico College and allowing some uncomfortable conversations to take place.

Until we're willing to do that, we can hope groups like Los Alamos Study Group and Nuclear Watch New Mexico can shift the employment focus at the Lab and create new and different types of jobs.

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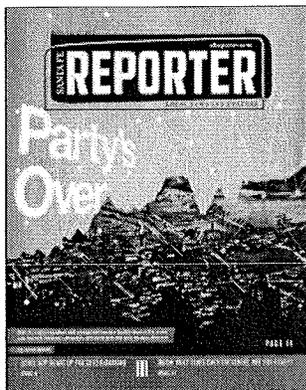
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Party's Over

With its budget slashed and a proposed nuclear facility dead in the water, Los Alamos National Laboratory and local activists look for new direction

Wren Abbott



On the morning of Feb. 13, Joni Arends, executive director of Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety, was sitting in her downtown Santa Fe office when a flurry of emails suddenly flooded her inbox. President Barack Obama had just released his fiscal year 2013 budget, and it dealt a serious blow to a project against which Arends and others have been campaigning for years. The budget recommended that not a single penny go to construction of the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement nuclear facility, a proposed plutonium pit manufacturing plant at Los Alamos National Laboratory. The CMRR was supposed to ramp up production of plutonium pits, allowing LANL to maintain the US' nuclear weapons stockpile by replacing old warheads with newly manufactured ones. It was to replace the older (and confusingly named) Chemistry and Metallurgy Research (CMR) facility,

which was built in the 1950s. (Part of the new CMRR complex, called the Radiological Laboratory Utility Office Building, was completed in 2010.) Instead, Obama recommended funding construction of a different nuclear laboratory, in Tennessee, and deferring construction of the CMRR for five years.

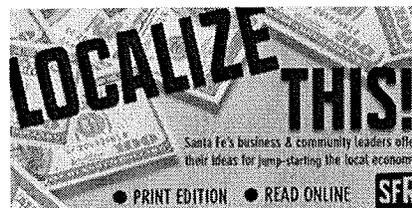
Greg Mello, executive director of Los Alamos Study Group, was at his "battle station"—his desk at LASG's Albuquerque office—when he read about the budget recommendation on the White House Office of Management and Budget website.

"Washington was rife with rumors, but the precise wording [of the budget recommendation] was unknown to us," Mello says. "We were very happy because the budget said in black and white that they didn't need the facility."

Two days later, at the routine organizational meeting for Nuclear Watch New Mexico, Executive Director Jay Coghlan and Operations and Research Director Scott Kovac took time to bask in the good news.

"We did toast with champagne," Coghlan says.

Though they might not agree on what killed the CMRR—or even whether it's really dead—these activists certainly had a reason to congratulate themselves. The CMRR, first conceived in 1999, would have cost



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approximately \$6 billion to construct, would have increased the amount of waste the lab generates and would have further committed LANL to a mission of nuclear weapons manufacturing. After cracking open the champagne, however, these activists had a new cause: figuring out what exactly this fork in the road means for LANL and for northern New Mexico.

Eight days after the budget was released, LANL announced it would have to lay off 400-800 workers, ideally through voluntary separation packages. Since LANL is regarded as one of the primary economic engines of northern New Mexico, the CMRR defunding was seen as a threat to the region's economic health. Española Mayor Alice Lucero even made public comments suggesting that the CMRR would help achieve lab cleanup milestones required under law, though this is not the case. (An operating CMRR would have increased the lab's waste output and is unrelated to cleanup.)

But even though the timing of the news release suggested the layoffs were a direct consequence of the CMRR's defunding, the lab has backpedaled from that assertion. At a March 13 public forum in Española, LANL Executive Director Richard Marquez said the CMRR defunding "doesn't affect" the need to lay off employees, but added that, had the CMRR's construction been funded, the number of employees the lab would need to cut "might have been a smaller range." But when an audience member asked Marquez to give a number for that range, he said he couldn't.

Maximum fee paid to the University of California when it was LANL's operator: **\$8.5 million**

Fee paid to Los Alamos National Security, the private conglomeration of companies that now operates LANL, in FY 2011: **\$74 million**

\$900 million is the amount spent on the CMRR so far, including construction of the Radiological Laboratory Utility Office Building, meant to accompany the nuclear facility that is no longer being built. The RLUOB contains 20,000 square feet of lab space and a training facility. It goes into operation next month, and since the budget release, LANL has already been planning ways to adapt the building to the new circumstances. Although the RLUOB was designed as a support building for the CMRR, it can handle plutonium as well—as much as 8.4 grams at a time.

On Feb. 29, Donald Cook, deputy administrator of defense for the National Nuclear Security Administration, spoke at a hearing of the House Appropriations Committee's Energy and Water Development Subcommittee. Cook, whose organization oversees LANL, said the amount of plutonium the RLUOB can handle might be much more than originally intended.

"We...ultimately succeeded in expanding the level of plutonium work that could be done...in RLUOB by a full factor of four," Cook said. But such an increase in the amount of plutonium processed at LANL—and the potential risks it entails—hasn't gone through the environmental impact evaluation and public input process.

Mello and Arends are crying foul.

"I am concerned that NNSA can change its mind without any kind of public notification or independent review and can do so without so much as a formal rule-making process," Mello says. Under federal law, LANL has to notify the public, and often solicit its input, on such decisions.

"Are they just giving themselves permission to increase [the amount of plutonium]?" Arends asks. "There's a lot of unanswered questions."

NNSA spokeswoman Toni Chiri assures SFR that NNSA will "interface with stakeholders and the public" as it moves forward with the possibility of

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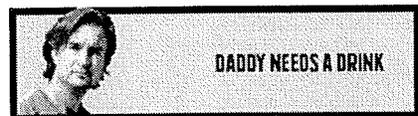
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increasing the RLUOB's plutonium handling capacity. Chiri says new international standards for evaluating plutonium exposure risks broadened the options for handling plutonium in the RLUOB.

One question is why, if the RLUOB can do four times what it was originally designed to, and partly fulfill the role envisioned for the CMRR, the public is only hearing about this now. NNSA administrator Tom D'Agostino told Congress five years ago that it might be possible to continue plutonium pit production in Los Alamos without the CMRR, and now, that's proving to be true. The lab plans to use the old CMR building, along with a plutonium facility called PF-4 and the RLUOB, to do what it said was impossible without the new CMRR.

The problem is that a federal nuclear safety oversight board has documented issues with the seismic safety, fire protection and ventilation systems in the two older buildings. Both are located near the Guaje Mountain seismic fault, geologist Robert Gilkeson says, in an area hit by significant earthquakes approximately every 2,500 years. LANL already shut down three of the CMR's eight wings due to such concerns.

But Marquez told the community forum that the CMR will be in operation until 2020, and Kovac says LANL is removing plutonium stores from the CMR and PF-4 plutonium facilities, eliminating the need for the CMRR, which would partly have been used to store plutonium. As activists have been urging the lab to do all along, it is moving the inventory to a Nevada facility with less seismic risk. In addition, glove boxes for working with plutonium are being retrofitted for seismic safety, as activists have also been demanding for years, Kovac says. But Arends says that, until she sees documentation of these steps, activists won't know whether public notification and other requirements are being met.

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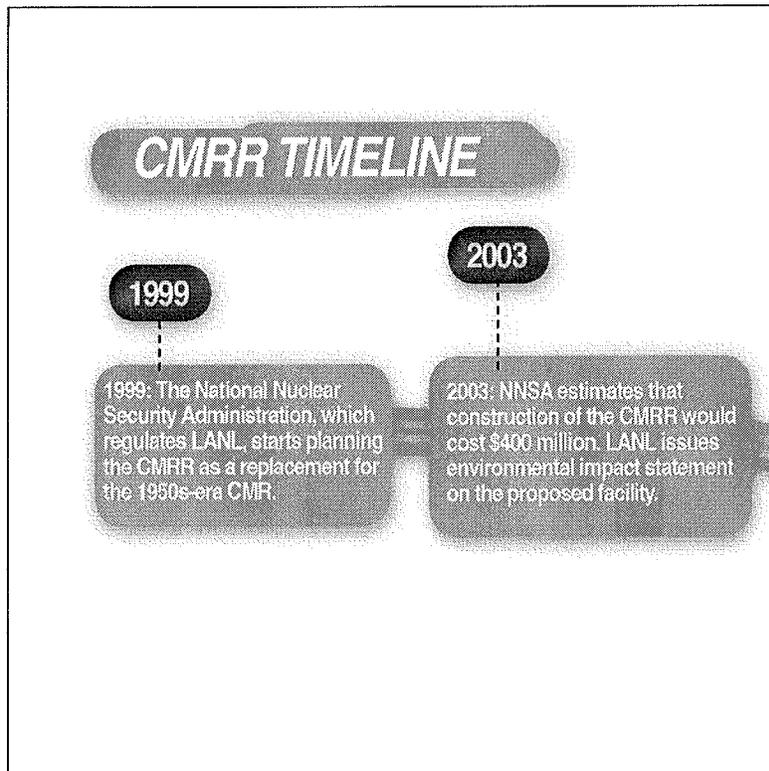
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Will LANL still eventually build the CMRR?

The president's budget calls it a five-year deferral, but is there really a chance the CMRR's construction will

be funded in FY 2018?

YES:

- \$900 million has already been spent on its design, plus the construction of the RLUOB.

- “You never know what Congress is going to do in going along with something. I can just see the lab director saying, ‘Hey man, without CMRR, we really can’t certify these weapons anymore,’ and that kind of stuff. Congress generally feels intellectually insecure in challenging anything to do with nuclear technology and nuclear weapons in particular.”—Peter Stockton, senior investigator with Project on Government Oversight

NO:

- The plan to extend the life of certain warheads that would necessitate the production of more pits has not even been approved yet.

- Obama plans to release (at an as-yet-unannounced date) an implementation plan for his Nuclear Posture Review that may further reduce the number of nuclear weapons the US can keep in its stockpile.

- The lab is already making moves to use existing facilities to create enough plutonium pits for our current life extension programs for nuclear weapons.

- “I do believe it’s a bit of a Waterloo for nuclear weapons programs at Los Alamos. Not that I’m advocating complacency, but we definitely think it’s a very significant juncture.”—Coghlan

What was the last straw?

“One group can’t claim it was totally responsible, or one lawsuit was responsible,” for derailing the CMRR, Arends says, standing in front of a poster in her office depicting a decade of protests against the facility. But long-standing differences between the strategics of Santa Fe activists such as Arends and Nuclear Watch and those of Albuquerque-based Los Alamos Study Group became stark after the budget release “victory.” A March 10 article in The Santa Fe New Mexican gave the glory to Mello, who sued LANL in 2010 for allegedly violating federal public participation laws by dramatically changing the CMRR plans—and budget—after the facility’s environmental impact statement was approved. Mello has long differentiated himself from Arends and Nuclear Watch by declining to participate in most public forums and stating a lack of concern for drinking water issues caused by LANL’s contamination. He stands by his opinion that the specific issues raised by the lawsuit, rather than the broader-based concerns voiced by the Santa Fe activists, put the last nail in the CMRR’s coffin.



Diversification

With the concentration of PhDs at LANL and the state's potential position on the forefront of alternative energy technologies, the call for the lab to diversify and focus more on such peaceful, forward-thinking research is a common one. US Sen. Tom Udall, D-NM, made that suggestion in an interview with SFR last month. Sandia National Laboratories in Albuquerque has so far diversified better than LANL, Udall says.

"We don't do enough energy research," Udall says. "If you compare medical to energy, medical invests far more in that field in research, and that's why they have so much innovation, and we just don't fund that in the energy area. And really, we're going to do that in the future...a lot of that work's going to be done at our national labs."

Atrophy

Mello says the idea of LANL turning into an alternative energy research center is unrealistic.

"We're not talking about a 'green' lab; that's silly," Mello says. "Congress is not the tiniest bit interested. And that kind of thinking just perpetuates the problem. The lab is...not a solution; the solution lies in our communities."

Alternatives to fossil fuel technology are the future, Mello says, but those will be developed in the private sector and in smaller nonprofits—not at a weapons lab. The best thing northern New Mexico can do is work toward that goal independently and become less reliant on LANL as an economic engine, he says.

Cleanup

With the CMRR off the table, at least for now, activists can turn more of their attention to cleanup issues, Arends says.

"I think we should be focused on getting the contaminants out of the storm water that's flowing through the canyons to the Rio Grande," Arends says.

Kovac says the lab may be more receptive to that idea, too, now that it's not preoccupied with the CMRR.



The Radiological Laboratory Utility Office Building, which is already complete, was to be the first step in construction of the CMRR. It cost about \$400 million to build and equip.

"We have sources inside the lab that say designing the CMRR was just taking everybody's focus and everybody's attention, and it was just this huge suck of energy," Kovac says. "Everybody was focused on it. I think everybody can get back to work and do their regular jobs now that that's over, and I believe it will have a positive effect on cleanup."

One thing everyone agrees on is that LANL—and by extension, northern New Mexico—is at a turning point.

"The party is over," Mello says. "The death of the CMRR is part of the process. It's a marker, a data point in the unraveling of our imperial way of being...it's a very hopeful time." SFR

Officials Join To Lobby For LANL Funds

By Bill Rodgers / Journal Staff Writer on Sat, Mar 24, 2012



A coalition of northern New Mexico local government officials are lobbying against federal funding cuts at Los Alamos National Laboratory that they say could hurt waste cleanup and cost the regional economy millions of dollars.

“When it comes to LANL, too often it takes a crisis to bring our community together,” said Española Mayor Alice Lucero.

She said her city has thousands of people who commute to work at the lab each day. “It’s the economic foundation for our community,” Lucero said.

The coalition, made up of officials from the city and county of Santa Fe, Española, Rio Arriba County, Los Alamos County and Taos County, held a news conference Friday at the Santa Fe convention center in which they discussed a recent trip to Washington to lobby on behalf of LANL.

Santa Fe Mayor David Coss said the Washington trip, on March 4-6, included meeting with the Senate Armed Services Committee, the Senate and House Finance Committees and the National Nuclear Security Administration.

The group plans to continue meeting and find new ways to lobby lawmakers against the cuts, including, according to Los Alamos County Council Chairwoman Sharon Stover, a citizen letter-writing campaign.

The local leaders, in pushing for more lab money, are emphasizing the need to clean up the lab’s long-term or “legacy” waste, not LANL’s current weapons-related work or other research.

“Funding cuts are undermining (the Department of Energy’s) commitment to a safe and timely cleanup,” the coalition said in a statement, although the group did say it also would fight for “modernization of facilities to accomplish the national security mission.”

Letters to Congress provided Friday say “cleanup is not an optional activity at LANL, but is based on the legal requirement to protect human health and the environment.”

The coalition wrote to the Senate and House Energy and Water Subcommittees in which the coalition said it supported New Mexico Sens. Jeff Bingaman and Tom Udall in calling for \$250 million for site cleanup in the fiscal year 2013 budget.

The letters note the Obama Administration’s budget proposal includes \$239 million for remediation and say both figures are lower than what is needed at LANL.

State Environment Secretary David Martin said that, based on meetings with the Senate Appropriations Committee, LANL would be “lucky” to get the \$239 million.

Greg Mello, of the watchdog Los Alamos Study Group, issued a press release Friday saying the coalition was exaggerating the need for layoffs at the lab because of budget cuts, stating that the funding reductions would return the lab’s spending to what it had been two years ago.

He said the facility had been squandering money on projects such as a now-stymied, multibillion-dollar plutonium-handling facility.

“If there was a problem, it’s that they hired people anticipating growth,” Mello said.

He added later that LANL never considered an alternative to the plutonium facility.

“LANL should be seriously penalized for wasting more than half a billion dollars on a nuclear facility,” he said. “It was them pushing for it the whole time.”

LANL announced in February that 400 to 800 workers would leave the facility this spring. The laboratory is offering workers a “voluntary separation program,” in which workers would accept severance packages based on their years of service at the facility. This move is to reduce the size of the facility’s work force by up to 11 percent.

Mello supported LANL getting funding for waste remediation.

“Those would be union jobs,” he said. “... There’s potentially a lot of cleanup work there.”

Chemical flare-up

The press release from the coalition of community leaders seized on an incident last week in which workers were trying to determine the chemical contents of a decades-old canister dug up from a 1940s dump site. The chemical from the old container caused a “flare up” when the it came into contact with the air. The coalition said the incident illustrates the need to fund clean-up efforts.

No one was injured in the incident and the unidentified chemical was not released into the environment, according to a lab spokesman.

The coalition also circulated figures which claim that between Los Alamos County, Santa Fe County, Rio Arriba County and other regions surrounding the lab, LANL pays nearly \$1.3 billion in wages for more than 13,500 jobs.

LANL representatives have said that the current fiscal year budget is down \$300 million, from \$2.2 billion the previous year.

“LANL is the largest employer in the region, and funding cuts are leading to a reduction in jobs, which directly undermine(s) our regional economy,” the coalition’s statement said.

The National Nuclear Security Administration recently asked President Barack Obama's administration to halt construction of the new plutonium facility, which has cost \$600 million over the last ten years without any construction.

LANL is also responsible for waste remediation, notably of 17,000 drums of radioactive waste which have been stored above ground for decades. LANL is responsible for moving this off of lab property by 2014. The lab has been doing cleanup work on sites around the facility, at times using federal stimulus money.