



Comment to the Regional Coalition of LANL Communities

Thank you for this opportunity to speak. I want to especially recognize my mayor and chair of this regional coalition David Coss of Santa Fe, who saw to it that community voices could be heard at this meeting. I know that's David's intentions are excellent, motivated by his desire to see jobs created for Santa Feans and the City's water supplies permanently protected from LANL contaminants. Because of that I was then alarmed when I heard the head of the Santa Fe Chamber of Commerce say on KTRC 1260 AM that the Santa Fe mayor as a member of this Regional Coalition was unequivocally in support of LANL's budget, without stating any qualifications. David of course has to speak for himself, but I know that's not true.

The fact of the matter is that LANL's institutional budget of around \$2.3 annually is just under two-thirds for core research, testing and production programs for nuclear weapons. The Lab tries to play games with the budget numbers, for example breaking safeguards and security out as a separate budget category at 7% on their web site in order to bring the overall nuclear weapons percentage down to around 57%. But safeguards and security are there because of the nuclear weapons work, and to break it out separately is contrary to the NNSA presents to Congress in its annual budget request where they are included under "Total Weapons Activities."

Moreover, all remaining Lab programs, including cleanup, support nuclear weapons programs at least indirectly through the excessive rate of overhead at nearly 50%. Some non-weapons programs even directly support nuclear weapons programs. My favorite example is Earth Science, funded under the budget category of Science with a capital S. I know that a decade or so ago much of it was about the geologic effects of earth-penetrating nuclear weapons.

The point I'm making here is don't expect the City of Santa Fe, either its municipal government or the majority of its citizens, to support nuclear weapons programs at LANL. I think that would also be true of the County and City of Taos. The Regional Coalition and those who presume to speak for it in public should not stretch or blur the participation of these local governments into implying support for LANL's general budget, especially when it goes to directly lobby Congress. The corollary is that the Santa Fe and Taos City and County governments should be clear and insistent about this as well.

By asking local governments to support any portion of the Lab's budget the Regional Coalition is in effect asking them what they can do for LANL. I think that should be reversed and the question should become what can LANL do for the local population. Yesterday's front-page story in the New Mexican is how this state has the most severe income gap of any off all 50 states.

I don't think there could be a starker example of the privileged 1% and the remaining 99% than Los Alamos County and the rest of New Mexico. Here you have the 2nd richest county in the U.S. in

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per capita income, with the most millionaire households per capita, while the state as a whole has the highest rate of poverty at 22% of the entire population. Here you have a county that according to Census Bureau data is over 80% non-Hispanic Caucasian, in the only state where so-called minority populations are the majority. Here you have a state in which the politicians and the nuclear weapons labs themselves constantly tout the paramount economic importance of the DOE presence in this state. But what good has that really done for the average New Mexican? But how does that jibe with the fact that New Mexico has slipped from being 37th in per capita income in 1959 to bumping along the bottom in 2010, along with so many other socioeconomic indicators?

As yesterday's article points out, there are really two economies in New Mexico, one of the privileged high paying jobs like at LANL, and the other of a poor and still largely rural state. I quote the article, "The reality is that the workers don't work in the same workforce. This is a reflection of deep inequality that remains in New Mexico." Thus it is really backwards for the Regional Coalition to ask what the local governments can do for LANL when it should be the other around.

I'm reminded of the old Ray Charles song "Them's That Gots Are Them That Gets." The semi-autonomous nuclear weapons agency, the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA, has funded the Regional Coalition with \$100,000. The Los Alamos County government is enriched by gross receipts taxes on Lab operations, and then gives the Regional Coalition \$150,000 to have local governments go lobby to support Lab operations, which again are nearly two-thirds for nuclear weapons. I find this incestuous loop while not illegal certainly distasteful. And I am wondering where future job growth is for the average New Mexican.

We should all be realistic about LANL's future and where job growth can occur. I predict that Los Alamos National Laboratory is going to shrink over the decade, a process that has already begun, in part driven in the 10-fold rise in profits for management by Bechtel and the University of California. Nuclear weapons programs are going to be cut back for a number of reasons, and in my book that is a good thing. There has been some recent excitement over a possible expanded plutonium mission under the Mixed Oxide (MOX) Program that could create up to a 100 jobs, but that is likely to have little positive impact on the northern New Mexican economy. It could in fact harm tourism when it becomes known that up to an additional 2.5 metric tons could be coming to the Lab for every year until 2034 (and that's without accidents). Additionally, although it's touted as a nonproliferation program burning up weapons-grade plutonium in commercial nuclear reactors, it is in fact a proliferating program that by definition seeks to introduce plutonium to the global commercial market. Further, the Mixed Oxide Program is a financial boondoggle currently kept on life support by powerful South Carolina politicians. It will fail as another link in the ever-growing chain of spectacular NNSA and DOE failures. It is also a subset of the dying and discredited nuclear power industry that never could stand on its own two feet without taxpayer subsidies. The nation can no longer afford boondoggles that like this, and the MOX program too will probably collapse someday of its own weight.

Which brings me to predict that there are two potential job growth areas at the Lab: these nonproliferation programs (without MOX) and cleanup. Again, nuclear weapons programs will fortunately shrink over time, and almost all alternatives to them are economically ruled out by the Lab's astronomically high rate of overhead at 50%. The Lab is not capable of competing, and therefore will not attract major investments in, for example, renewable energy technologies. Additionally, the Lab is no longer protected by the seniority of Senators Domenici and Bingaman,

and there are 98 other senators out there with long budget knives in this increasingly constrained economic climate.

The future job growth that can occur at LANL will be work that has to occur at LANL. By definition cleanup of LANL has to occur at LANL. With respect to nonproliferation programs the Lab does have vital nuclear expertise that will be crucial to maintain for nuclear weapons forensics and treaty verification technologies that can provide the technical underpinnings for working toward a future world free of nuclear weapons. I am a strong advocate for growth in LANL's nonproliferation programs, again excepting MOX. But we should be realistic that these programs will never be able to compensate for the loss of money and jobs in the nuclear weapons programs.

So I am finally getting down to the business point at hand here. If local governments and the New Mexican congressional delegation really want job creation push hard for comprehensive cleanup. But be warned that this is exactly where the Regional Coalition could stand in the way. There is a fact sheet about itself on its web site that describes the Regional Coalition's missions and functions.¹ Under the header of "FEDERAL INVESTMENT = HUGE RETURNS TO TAXPAYERS" that fact sheet states

.. upfront investments in regional, governmental partnerships yield significant returns for the taxpayer. At Rocky Flats, for instance, DOE provided the local government organization approximately \$300,000/year for seven years. In return, DOE was able to proactively resolve complex technical and policy issues.... resolving those issues with local elected officials was part of the reason Rocky Flats closed years early, saving the taxpayer billions of dollars.

In my view, this is code for payoffs to the local governments to buy their assent for cleanup on the cheap. What occurred at Rocky Flats has direct relevance to LANL as both as been central to plutonium pit production. So-called cleanup at Rocky Flats was such that heavily contaminated soils were only lightly treated below 3 feet, and not at all below 6 feet. This may sound okay, but some of the most dangerous and polluted buildings in the U.S. were collapsed into their own basements and buried left untreated. To top it off, knowing that Rocky Flat's so-called cleanup could meet never meet residential standards, with the stroke of a pen the U.S. government turned it into a wildlife refuge.

If local governments and the congressional delegation really want job creation insist on comprehensive cleanup at LANL. Recall that the estimated \$6 billion for the now postponed Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement Project (CMRR) for expanded plutonium pit production was NOT going to produce a single new permanent job (instead it would merely relocate existing jobs). In contrast, comprehensive cleanup of Area G, the Lab's biggest radioactive dump, could create hundreds of high paying jobs for decades while permanently protecting the environment.

1 "Regional Coalition Fact Sheet,"

http://www.losalamosnm.us/news/Documents/2012.3.22_Regional%20Coalition%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf
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In December or January the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) will give preliminary approval or not for the Lab's proposed method of cleanup for Area G. This will be followed by a public comment period of at least 60 days and public hearings. There may also be hearings on Area G in the New Mexican House and/or Senate. LANL has submitted its preferred "remedy" of "cap and cover" with an estimated cost of \$186 million, while leaving all of the wastes in place. This would take three years to build, followed by 30 years of monitoring and soil vapor extraction and a century of "institutional controls" (i.e. fences). LANL claims that this cap will protect the public and the environment for 1,000 years. However, many of the buried radionuclides in Area G will remain dangerous for 10's to 100's of thousands of years, and the dump is undisputedly located in an active seismic zone between a rift and a dormant supervolcano. For protection of the environment and posterity we should be thinking in terms of 10,000 years and beyond.

The Lab also submitted an estimate of full cleanup and offsite disposal of Area G wastes at \$29 billion. This seems clearly financially impossible, leading to its automatic rejection. But is that estimate for comprehensive cleanup of Area G credible, especially given LANL's deteriorating reputation for cost estimates? We believe that when LANL wants to do something it lowballs the estimate. For example the Lab originally priced the CMRR at \$660 million in 2004, but that cost increased almost 10-fold in 8 years. The flip side is that when the Lab doesn't want to do something it grossly inflates the cost estimate, such as its estimated \$29 billion for comprehensive cleanup of Area G, a figure that even NMED officials ridicule in private.

Nuclear Watch New Mexico has calculated cleanup costs for Area G by extrapolating actual costs from the nearly completed cleanup of Material Disposal Area B and cross checking that against recently released estimates for cleanup of MDA C. ² But don't trust us. What we are trying to do is spur LANL and NMED to calculate realistic cost projections so that we can have an informed debate over Area G cleanup. What we found is that comprehensive cleanup should cost around the same estimated \$6 billion that the CMRR would have cost. **But instead of \$6 billion dollars for an unneeded plutonium facility for expanded nuclear weapons production that wouldn't produce a single new permanent job, 6 billion dollars for comprehensive clean up of Area G would be a win-win for New Mexicans. It would permanently protect the environment, groundwater and the Rio Grande while creating 100's of long-term high paying jobs.**

Recommendations:

- **Support and direct lobbying by the Regional Coalition for LANL's budget should be narrowly and explicitly defined as not including support for the Lab's nuclear weapons programs. If not participating County and City governments should first make their objections clear and then, if not satisfied, reconsider their involvement in the Coalition.**
- **The Regional Coalition for LANL Communities should not condone LANL's preferred method of "cleanup" for Area G, which is cap and cover. Instead it should adopt a position advocating for comprehensive cleanup of Area G.**
- **If the Regional Coalition fails to advocate for comprehensive cleanup of Area G the local governments should do so independent of the Coalition. The objective is to permanently protect the environment while creating 100's of high-paying jobs. c**

² Please see "What Should Comprehensive Cleanup of Area G Cost? Budget Comparisons between Material Disposal Areas B, C, and G," Nuclear Watch New Mexico, November 2012, http://nukewatch.org/facts/nwd/Area_G_Comparison_Costs-11-14-12.pdf