

## DC DAYS REPORT: 5/19/19 – 5/24/19

For the week of May 19-25, Nuclear Watch New Mexico was in Washington participating in the Alliance for Nuclear Accountability's 31<sup>st</sup> annual DC Days. The issues ANA, and NukeWatch NM specifically, tackled during the week included lobbying for No New Bomb Plants, fighting proposals for plutonium pit production at LANL and MOX facilities, arguing against plans for Yucca mountain and consolidated interim storage (while presenting and educating on the alternative option of Hardened On-Site Storage), and supporting safer, smarter policy initiatives including a No First Use Policy, legislation Restricting First Use of Nuclear Weapons, and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. After the lobbying days concluded, ANA held their annual Spring Meeting, which consisted of a two-day debriefing and planning session to discuss thoughts on lobbying meetings and new plans for the months ahead.

Nuclear Watch New Mexico participated in over 15 different lobbying meetings during the week. One straightforward request brought up in every meeting was for congress to maintain funding the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board, and not support DOE Order 140.1, which limits DNFSB's power to supervise DOE weapons sites through reducing contractor communications and limiting the Board's facility access to these sites. Anything less than complete, independent oversight of DOE weapons sites means that these facilities struggling to clean up waste and contamination will essentially become regulated by DOE themselves, which clearly poses a conflict of interest. NukeWatch NM made sure congress knew that four parts of DOE Order 140.1 are contrary to the law (a determination made by DNFSB and confirmed by public comments at three different hearings), and asked members to provide no funding for the implementation of this order. This request was responded to positively in most meetings, and ANA is optimistic about this Order not being funded.

Another item brought up frequently by Nuclear Watch New Mexico in these meetings is the huge, nationwide problem of Nuclear Waste, and the question of what to do with it. We asked that Congress not appropriate funds for Yucca Mountain or Consolidated Interim Storage, proposed "solutions" that would cost taxpayers over \$150 million just to begin the process of restarting licensing and other initial DOE activities. The state of Nevada will continue to oppose the designation of Yucca Mountain as a waste repository, and private facilities hoping to benefit from consolidating the waste in New Mexico, Utah, and Texas have faced heavy resistance from the public. These companies want the government to pay for their facilities with funds from the Nuclear Waste Fund, and they want congress to change the NWPA so that taxpayers will own the waste and be responsible for transportation and storage. The request to congress involving these issues was that congress should prohibit DOE's "interpretation" of High Level Waste, and also not appropriate fund for Yucca Mountain or Consolidated Interim Storage. Instead, congress should improve public safety by requiring Hardened On-Site Storage at or near reactor sites. During the Spring Meeting following the lobbying days, the consensus of ANA members was that Yucca Mountain and CIS will almost certainly NOT be funded, and the idea of purposing funds for HOSS is possible but not yet entirely probable or feasible.

On the weapons side, Nuclear Watch New Mexico was focused on lobbying for congress not to fund new or expanded bomb production capacity without mission need justification and required environmental reviews. Pit production at LANL used to be capped at 20 pits per year, but last year NNSA announced it will produce at least 30 pits per year at LANL and at least 50 more at the Savannah River Site. NNSA's FY20 budget request more than doubled "plutonium sustainment" to \$691 million, including \$410 million to repurpose the failed MOX Facility at SRS for pit production. NNSA intends to spend \$30 *billion* over the next 30 years to expand pit production capacity. There is not a clear, verifiable justification for these numbers, and we argued to congress that there is no need to expand plutonium pit

production. We attempted to make clear that changes in pit design could push the US back into testing with serious proliferation consequences. In meeting with more conservative offices, Nuclear Watch New Mexico focused especially on the argument that, even if expanded pit production was necessary, any change in pit production capacity requires nationwide public review under the National Environmental Policy Act. The main request here to congress was that expanded pit production should not be funded until a clear justification is presented and all required environmental reviews are completed. The success of this ask was not completely evident, however ANA groups are committed to bringing legislation against NNSA if congress is not supportive of this request.

DOE Order 140.1, Yucca Mountain and CIS, and expansion of plutonium pit production were the main issues of focus for Nuclear Watch New Mexico during the three days of lobbying meetings. Other ANA group members discussed more on policy initiatives regarding nuclear weapons, and argued against congress funding new “advanced” nuclear reactor technologies. An essential part of this task was reminding congress that, despite popular opinion, nuclear energy is not ‘clean’ energy; nuclear power uses more water than any other electricity source and produces dangerous nuclear waste. Nuclear power costs too much money and takes too much time to be an effective counter against climate change, and it seemed necessary to emphasize these points to members of congress excited about the idea of small modular reactors, which they incorrectly believe will reduce the cost of electricity for their constituents.

As a recent addition to the NukeWatch NM staff, this was my first time attending the Alliance for Nuclear Accountability’s annual DC Days. This week was not only informative in terms of learning about the crucial nuclear issues first-hand, it was also enlightening to see the inner workings of congress and experience the true functioning and subtleties (or lack thereof) of US government. A large part of why I learned as much as I did, and was able to feel so engaged, was due to being surrounded by the most genuine and helpful set of people. I would not have felt as comfortable in this world of politics and lobbying (so foreign to me before now), if it was not for the other members of ANA organizations that treated me as an equal contributor, despite my lack of knowledge in certain areas. This experience felt invaluable and I’m incredibly grateful for the opportunity to have participated in this event. In moving forward, I’m excited to follow the progress of the requests made this week, and also to continue educating myself about these vastly complicated issues and their histories.

- Sophie Stroud, NukeWatch NM webmaster