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# Opinion

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Sunday, June 24, 2007

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## LANL Can Begin Diversifying Now

BY JAY COGHLAN

I have opposed nuclear weapons programs at Los Alamos National Laboratory for 18 years. For the first time, I feel there is a chance the lab can seriously change its mission. The U.S. House Appropriations Committee cut \$400 million from the Department of Energy's nuclear weapons budget for fiscal year 2008 compared to last year, but added approximately \$800 million for non-proliferation and energy efficiency programs that LANL can complete for.

Sen. Pete Domenici and U.S. Rep. Heather Wilson are now sounding the alarm over job losses and claiming threats to national security. The House cuts were overwhelmingly directed against provocative new-design nuclear weapons under the so-called Reliable Replacement Warhead (RRW) program, and against projects that would accelerate Los Alamos becoming the nation's permanent plutonium pit production center.

Wilson has even gone so far as to publicly say that "the decisions embedded in this (House Appropriations) legislation will lead us either to return to nuclear testing, or to abandon nuclear deterrence because we will stop maintaining the stockpile." This is an outrageous and unsupported statement. We now know that our existing nuclear weapons, tested in Nevada many times, are far more reliable than previously believed, due to a

November 2006 conclusion by high-level independent experts that the crucial plutonium pit "triggers" have reliable lifetimes of a century or more. In turn, this means we don't need RRW and expanded pit production at Los Alamos.

### Global impact

Instead, new untested nuclear weapons that could lead to resumed testing, with very negative global nonproliferation impacts. Furthermore, DOE explicitly plans to pay for RRW by progressively cutting and ending "Life Extension Programs" for existing reliable nuclear weapons, thereby potentially undermining our capacity for nuclear deterrence.

But what are proper future Laboratory missions? First, three critical assumptions: the lab will not miraculously go away, it will remain a national security lab, and it should provide vital national security services. But we need a new national security strategy for today's world, not new nuclear warheads for a world gone by. Nukes will not help us win the "war on terror." Instead, if we don't eradicate nuclear weapons globally, they could devastate us.

### A proposed future

Now to appropriate future Lab missions:

- First, there needs to be genuine curatorship of

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# Changes at LANL Could Benefit All

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nuclear weapons while we progress toward the 1970 Non-Proliferation Treaty's mandate to disarm, not the regressive Stockpile Stewardship Program that the labs have implemented. Disarmament can't and politically won't happen unilaterally — it must be built on progressive, multilateral steps. Let's lead and persuade others by solid example to follow.

■ Nonproliferation efforts at the lab should be the top priority. Sophisticated verification techniques will be needed to verify compliance with a future test ban treaty. Another need is remote detection of nuclear weapons and materials. There is critical intelligence work to be done, such as nuclear materials accounting and tracking. The ultimate goal of nuclear disarmament can never be

achieved without rigorous verification measures, for which LANL can help provide the technical basis. Also, there should be increased technical support for accelerated nuclear warhead dismantlement.

■ Port security must be strongly enhanced. I dread that a nuclear weapon will be smuggled onto our shores in a sea container, which lab-developed detection technology must help prevent. The present status of port security, nearly six years after 9-11, is a disgrace. Should this calamity ever occur, post-event nuclear forensics would be vital, as well as cleanup expertise.

■ Global pandemic modeling and technical support and modeling for protecting national infrastructure from both potential terrorist events and natural calamities are needed — as Katrina and New Orleans have shown,

■ LANL's cleanup budget should be tripled, saving money in the long run, in a way that would favor regional companies as a matter of economic development. Effective cleanup technologies must be developed for application across the nuclear weapons complex, which so far LANL has failed to do.

■ Basic physics research, which has shrunk as the lab's nuclear weapons programs have grown, should be revitalized.

■ With its advanced supercomputers that now are primarily used for nuclear weapons simulations, the lab could support global climate change modeling without sucking all the money away from other long established entities in this field. The same is true for renewable energy research and development — DOE has an existing renewable lab in Col-

orado. LANL should reconstitute its geothermal site in the Jemez as a clean renewable resource that could have beneficial regional economic development. There is also vital energy efficiency work that LANL can do in leading us toward energy independence.

## Benefit New Mexico

As one individual, I can't possibly have all the answers for what LANL could and should do. But some things are certain. The lab has to diversify, there are important national security issues that should be addressed, and LANL should be of greater benefit to New Mexicans. I argue that new nuclear weapons and expanded plutonium pit production do not meet those needs.

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