



# WATCHDOG

news that bites back

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## **BIG BUSINESS AS USUAL** **Bechtel Adds Los Alamos to its Portfolio** **UC Keeps Name on Contract (Despite Past Performance)**

In a December 21 announcement that surprised many, powerful Lockheed Martin and its academic bidding partner, the University of Texas, failed to win the plum annual management contract for Los Alamos National Laboratory. The winning team consisted of Bechtel National, its roster of crony corporations, and the University of California, the lab's manager since the Manhattan Project. Despite UC's name still being on the contract, this signals a big shift for the lab. Like many of the nation's resources under this Administration, it is being privatized and placed into corporate hands, a little further from public view.

Bechtel's victory may be a cause for surprise, but not necessarily for relief. Department of Energy (DOE) officials say Bechtel/UC will provide better "integration of the nuclear weapons complex." Could "integration" be code for monopoly? Bechtel subsidiaries already co-manage Yucca Mountain, the Nevada Test Site, Y12, Savannah River and Pantex--and they subcontract at eight additional DOE sites. UC still runs Lawrence Livermore and Lawrence Berkeley Labs, along with Los Alamos. Perhaps DOE couldn't risk introducing a new cast of characters to the legacy of waste, contamination and mismanagement plaguing the national complex, more of which undoubtedly would have been exposed by a clean sweep at LANL.

How much do we know about the privately owned Bechtel? For starters, they have a long and checkered past with DOE: cost overruns and delays at Hanford, suppressed records of a nuclear accident at Oak Ridge, fines for safety violations at Pantex, Oak Ridge, Paducah....Outside of DOE, Bechtel has attained infamy for EPA citations for hazardous waste spills, delays and overruns at the Big Dig in Boston, and investigation by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission for their work at Three Mile Island.

Bechtel has no monopoly on expensive mistakes. UC has also racked up quite a track record. Consider a decade of management, environmental, safety and security scandals, topped off by last year's costly operations stand-down and recent allegations of missing plutonium (over 700 kilos).

During the award announcement a DOE official noted "concerns with regards to past [UC] performance," a polite reference to the fiscal and safety problems. In fact, DOE was so displeased with UC performance in 2004 that it withheld two-thirds of the performance-based LANL management fee. Nevertheless, DOE predicts that Lab operations will be improved simply because the corporate partners will bring "what they do best" to LANL management--while giving no details.

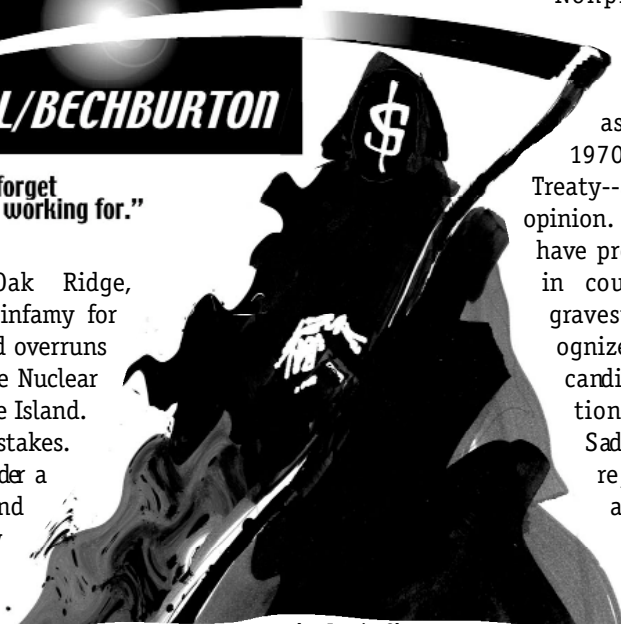
The retention of UC implies some continuity in Lab operations. But this gravy train has more drivers now. We will be watching closely as Bechtel and its network of corporate entities takes the reins of day-to-day nuclear lab operations. Will it become even more difficult to obtain information about what's happening and planned, now that the lab--so long shielded from scrutiny by national security and academic aura--hits the profit-driven corporate trail? How many veils of secrecy will we now have to penetrate to get the real story? (It's never been easy--see related story on p.2.)

Three bidding teams vied for the contract: Bechtel/UC; Lockheed Martin/UT; and Nuclear Watch New Mexico/Tri-Valley CARES. Only the last team offered a real alternative, proposing a new Lab Office of

Nonproliferation to shift away from LANL's aggressive nuclear weapons emphasis, so as to comply with the 1970 Non-Proliferation Treaty--and with international opinion. By example, this would have provided solid leadership in countering the nation's gravest security threat (recognized by both presidential candidates)--the proliferation of nuclear weapons. Sadly, DOE summarily rejected that proposal, and now the bid has been awarded to more "big business as usual." --SK & SP



**"We never forget  
who we're working for."**



cartoon by Jamie Chase

**We delayed taking this issue to press until the contract was awarded. That explains the unusual schedule. You will be hearing more soon!**

# State Government Weakens WIPP Oversight

The State of New Mexico has always had limited authority to regulate operations at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant, a dump near Carlsbad for plutonium-contaminated nuclear weapons waste. State authority is currently on the verge of being further weakened, if the Environment Department (NMED) finalizes the "Monster Modification" to its WIPP permit. We've informed you in these pages about the progress of this permit modification request. NMED released the draft permit in November, despite significant public opposition and lots of unanswered questions.

The US Department of Energy (DOE) has tried on many occasions to alter the agreement about what kinds of waste would go to WIPP, and how much testing they would undergo to verify their contents. "Legacy waste" from five decades of nuclear weapons production comes to WIPP from different DOE facilities--and offers uneven record-keeping.

Three **previously rejected** DOE permit modification requests somehow magically became more acceptable when combined into the "monster" now on the brink of approval:

**1. Waste sampling and testing will be nearly eliminated.** So-called "acceptable knowledge" (old written records) will now suffice. The permit used to require radiography, head-space gas sampling, or examination **before** shipping to WIPP.

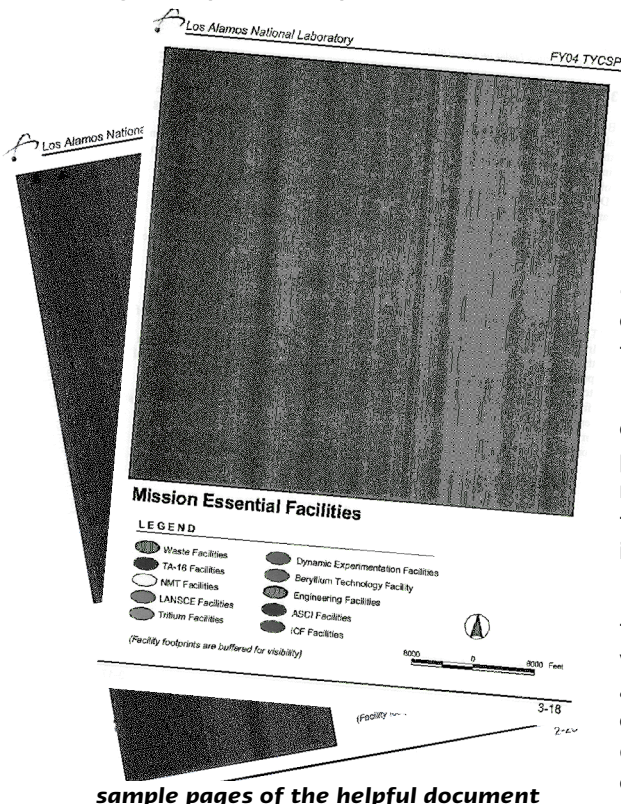
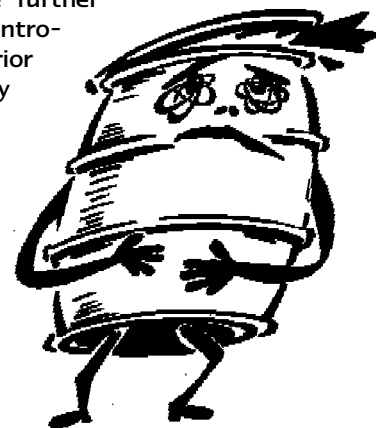
**2. Remote-handled (RH) waste, previously barred, could now be shipped to WIPP.** High-level waste (HLW) can slip into the facility now by the simple act of renaming it RH waste. The draft permit thus opens the door to dangerous wastes once illegal to dump at WIPP.

**3. Surface storage space in the aboveground facility at WIPP is being enlarged significantly.** This means, coupled with the above changes, that more dangerous kinds of waste, and waste that has undergone little or no physical analysis to verify its ingredients, can also sit around longer above ground prior to emplacement.

Governor Bill Richardson and NMED publicly opposed these changes when they were initially proposed by Sen. Pete Domenici in 2003 and 2004. Don't forget: Gov. Richardson, back when he was our Congressman, was one of the authors of the original WIPP Land Withdrawal Bill, which offered assurances to New Mexicans that high-level wastes wouldn't come to WIPP. In addition, both state and federal regulations currently require "a detailed chemical and physical analysis of a representative sample of the waste" before it can even be shipped to any disposal site. These laws haven't changed or gone away; the Governor's opposition shouldn't either. It's a mystery why NMED is changing its tune and caving in to DOE.

As of *Watchdog* press time, NMED's "monster mod" **public comment period** is until January 23, 2006. It's possible it will be further extended and some of the controversial points re-negotiated prior to the **public hearing** in early March. You can count on us to keep you informed about any developments. If you haven't yet submitted comments, there's still time. We need to keep the pressure on our state Environment Department. They should not abdicate from their responsibility to maintain as much oversight authority as possible, while long-lived toxic radioactive and chemical wastes are trucked through--and permanently dumped in--our state.

--SP  
P.S. Stay tuned. We have additional information on WIPP and the "monster mod" available at [www.nukewatch.org](http://www.nukewatch.org).



sample pages of the helpful document

## The Future of Los Alamos: Paint it Black Nuclear Weapons Establishment Enhances its Aura of Mystery

In response to our Freedom of Information Act request, DOE provided a fiscal year 2004 "Ten Year Comprehensive Site Plan" for the Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL). However, the Plan is more than 40% blacked out. Current information was given, but **nearly all aspects of the Lab's future were redacted**. Hidden under the blackness are future missions, budgets, facilities, land use and production rates.

The significance of the LANL Ten Year Comprehensive Site Plans cannot be overstated. The TYCSPs are the foundation for the strategic planning for the physical nuclear weapons complex, incorporating technical requirements, performance measures, and budget and cost projections. They establish realistic planning for, and execution toward, the **intended weapons complex of the future**.

Nuclear Watch New Mexico (NWNM) is **submitting an appeal** to the Department of Energy to order the release of an unredacted Plan, which has until the end of December in which to reach a decision. If this appeal fails, Nuclear Watch can then **seek satisfaction in federal court**. With the filing of this appeal, Nuclear Watch is taking steps to ensure that information the public needs on LANL's future sees the light of day.

--SK

# WHERE WE'VE BEEN...AND WHERE WE'RE GOING

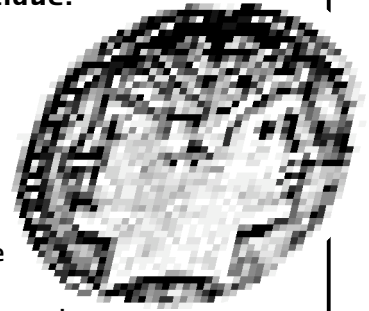
Starting a new year is a lot like crossing the street. It's a good time to look both ways.

## FOUR LOOKS BACK:

- NukeWatch was among the very first to publicize the new "Reliable Replacement Warhead" Program and **successfully argue to Congress** for restrictive language **against new nuclear weapons designs** for new military missions.
- We've been long-time foes of the Modern Pit Facility, intended to resume industrial-scale bomb production of plutonium pit "triggers," and the Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator, AKA the nuclear "bunker-buster." Both have been **cut by Congress for two consecutive years**.
- **Sued DOE** for inadequate review of **proposed biolab at Los Alamos** that would handle anthrax, plague, Q fever, etc. Biolab now two years behind originally scheduled opening.
- Supported the New Mexico Environment Department in a cleanup "**Corrective Action Order**" against Los Alamos; pressured the Department into a **new Lab waste permit, now six years overdue**.

## BIG 4 IN 2006:

- **Continuing advocacy against the Reliable Replacement Warhead Program.** In our view, it is a "nukes forever" jobs program for the privileged nuclear weapons enclaves and a Trojan horse for new designs.
- Given the defeat of the Modern Pit Facility, **countering the boomeranging pressure on Los Alamos to increase its own plutonium pit production**, a mission formerly done at the notorious Rocky Flats Plant near Denver. No Rocky Flats II in New Mexico!
- **Contesting Los Alamos' renewed effort to begin biolab operations.** We will rigorously analyze and critique the deeper level of environmental review that we forced DOE into.
- Encouraging/pressuring the Environment Department to translate its corrective action order and pending waste permit into actual **State-mandated cleanup of Los Alamos**. This is in contrast to the Lab's own plans of "cap and cover" and transferring cleanup to the nuclear weaponeers who caused the mess to begin with.



**NukeWatch TV** now airs on cable channel **16** in Santa Fe, still every Sunday at 7:30 p.m. We're also on in Albuquerque, Taos, Los Alamos and Silver City (call your cable access station for times)

## *obligatory ritualistic plea for funds*

We've been reluctant to hit your mailbox with our hands outstretched right during peak holiday spending time.

We know darn well that every other non-profit group in the solar system just asked you for a contribution.

And we can admit...maybe nuclear weapons and waste issues don't offer that traditional "warm and fuzzy" holiday feeling.

But folks, if you want us to keep working hard on these (faintly technical, often confusing, occasionally discouraging and always important) issues--

please take a moment to throw your watchdogs a bone.

(A check will do nicely.)

You'll feel better and so will we.

Thank you for your support...past, present and future.

Happy New Year from everyone at NukeWatch.

- Yes, I'll support Nuclear Watch, even though the issues you guys work on are kinda depressing.
- Sorry, nuclear weapons production is a cool use of my tax dollars, and really great for the environment. That's why I'm supporting the Department of Energy this year.
- Life forms will come from another planet and solve all of our problems.
- Go ahead, check the first box.

name

address

send checks to Nuclear Watch of New Mexico 551 Cordova Rd. #808 Santa Fe NM 87505

# DOE Nuclear Weapons Funding: Victories (and Defeats)!!

**Congress finally passed funding for DOE nuclear weapons programs for 2006. There were surprising, significant victories and unfortunate wrong new directions.**

- For the first time in a decade the DOE's nuclear weapons budget slightly decreased to \$6.4 billion. That's an encouraging start. Nevertheless, funding for research, development, testing and production remains nearly 50% above the Cold War average. That's shameful in the face of a lack of clear strategic nuclear threats, escalating federal deficits, hurricane reconstruction costs and cuts to social and environmental programs.

- Funding for warhead dismantlements was increased from the \$35 million requested by DOE to \$60 million. Credit goes to House leader Rep. David Hobson (R.-OH), whereas New Mexico's Senate leader Pete Domenici tried to slash dismantlements to \$15 million. Even \$60 million is less than 1% of the total nuclear weapons budget. Despite the end of the Cold War, we are still building them up instead of tearing

them down!

- The requested \$4 million in 2006 for the controversial Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator was rejected. That's chump change for DOE. However, the original

facility would signal resumed industrial-scale bomb production by the United States. As sweet as this victory is, the bad news is that there will be more pressure to increase production at Los Alamos. In a related (and ominous) move, construction was fully funded for an advanced plutonium lab at LANL to directly support pit production.

- Congress seems sold on the new Reliable Replacement Warhead Program (see article, page 5), and raised its funding from the \$9.4 million requested to \$25 million. With the encouragement of NukeWatch and other members of the Alliance for Nuclear Accountability, Congress legislated language that restricts the program to work on existing nuclear weapons. However, the weaponeers explicitly have new designs in their sights. We predict a protracted battle over this "nukes forever" program which amounts to a Trojan horse for new designs. --JC

**"I don't trust this group."**

**-- Rep. David Hobson,  
(referring to nuclear weapons designers)**

request was that low only because Congress deleted funding in 2005 after DOE projected five-year costs of \$485 million (while insisting that amount was all for studies). Maybe the nuclear bunker buster is finally dead after two consecutive Congressional rejections. Let's hope so!

- All funding was deleted for the Modern Pit Facility, a proposed new factory for the production of plutonium pits, the "triggers" for modern thermonuclear weapons. Since the pit is the critical component of nuclear weapons, constructing this

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## WORDS OF WISDOM FROM NOBEL PEACE PRIZE WINNERS

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The hard part is: how do we create an environment in which nuclear weapons – like slavery or genocide – are regarded as a taboo and a historical anomaly? Imagine if the only nuclear weapons remaining were the relics in our museums. Imagine the legacy we could leave to our children. Imagine that such a world is within our grasp."

--Mohamed ElBaradei,  
Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency  
accepting the Nobel Peace Prize, December 10, 2005.



## IN MEMORIAM

### Sir Joseph Rotblat 1908-2005

A physicist who left the Manhattan Project for reasons of conscience, after learning that



the Axis powers had no atomic weapons, he called upon scientists to address the nuclear threat to civilization, and to stop creating weapons of mass destruction--nuclear, chemical or biological.

"Above all, remember your humanity."

--accepting the Nobel Peace Prize, 1995.

# Nukes Forever: The Reliable Replacement Warhead

The United States tested 1,125 nuclear weapons before a testing moratorium began in 1992. The Department of Energy (DOE) then implemented a "Stockpile Stewardship Program" aimed at ensuring the reliability of existing weapons without full-scale testing. **Sixty-eight billion dollars later**, the three nuclear weapons labs now claim the Program isn't doing its job. They're advocating new designs under a "Reliable Replacement Warhead" Program.

Why wouldn't U.S. nukes be "reliable"? Short answer: they are, but **war planners want new designs for new purposes**. Obviously, the U.S. stockpile was extensively tested before the moratorium. Since 1992, all three weapons lab directors have annually certified reliability. Most weapons components are non-nuclear, so they can be rigorously tested in labs. As weapons age, the uncertainty has centered on plutonium pits, the modern thermonuclear "triggers." But studies by the labs have found "no first-order [aging] effects after decades." Senior nuclear weapons consultants say pits can last **60 to 90 years**, rather than DOE's presumed 45 years. Finally, "reliability" is here being defined as a weapon exploding within a certain percentage of its capability. So, it's not about whether the bomb will explode, but whether it would detonate at 475 kilotons, not 450 or 500. **Who cares--when this warhead is already equivalent to 30 Hiroshima bombs?**

The nuclear war planners care. Their real concern

is that the existing weapons are politically too big to use. **They want smaller, more "usable" bombs and nuclear "bunker-busters" to attack buried targets.**

Though our nuclear stockpile is plenty reliable, there are simple methods to approach near-certainty. Tritium, a radioactive form of hydrogen used to "boost" weapons, is routinely replenished due to its relatively short half-life. The senior consultants have consistently pointed out that **more frequent tritium replenishment** is a 'straightforward' way to ensure reliability.

A second possible method: **reverting to uranium-based weapons**. These are so technologically simple that

their only physical requirement is configuring enough highly enriched uranium for spontaneous detonation. WWII designers were so confident of the uranium weapon that destroyed Hiroshima, they didn't even test it in advance. (The Nagasaki bomb was a different type.)

Instead of implementing these virtually foolproof methods, the weaponeers are embarking on a "nukes forever" program. This directly **contradicts our unequivocal obligation to disarm under the 1970 NonProliferation Treaty**. Moreover, the perhaps intentional fog swirling around "reliability" likely conceals a Trojan horse that will be used to sneak new designs and new weapons into the U.S. arsenal. --JC



## **The Los Alamos Biolab is Baaaaaack!!! ...But NukeWatch Succeeds in Forcing Deeper Level of Review**

On November 29 the Department of Energy announced that it will complete a full "environmental impact statement" for an **already constructed advanced biowarfare agent facility** at the Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL). This biolab is a "Biosafety Level-3" (BSL-3) facility, just short of the highest "4" level reserved for incurable diseases like Ebola. It will handle and process pathogens like **anthrax, plague and Q fever, plus genetic modifications**. DOE asserts that the biolab will be used for defensive purposes only, but its location at a secret nuclear weapons site is enough to evoke international suspicions. Added to this are the Lab's troubled safety, security and environmental record and history of contamination with the radioactive materials that it has traditionally use. **If the Lab can lose hard drives with highly classified nuclear weapons data, imagine what the possibilities are with microscopic bioweapons germs that can replicate themselves!**

After completing a lesser environmental "assessment" in early 2002 that avoided rigorous scrutiny of potential security, safety and health risks, **DOE gave itself a green light** for BSL-3 operations. **NukeWatch sued**, and as a consequence DOE withdrew its go-ahead decision approval for the LANL biolab in January 2004. DOE now has conceded to our legal argument that a more rigorous "environmental impact statement" is needed before operations can begin.

**Where things now stand:** The first step required by federal law in the new environmental review is the opportunity for public comment on what the "scope" of the EIS should be. Originally, DOE set a deadline of December 29, coincidentally (?) when it would be the most difficult for the public to comment. Under pressure from NukeWatch this was changed to January 16. Pertinent scoping issues are mounting evidence of greater seismic risks than previously known, the earlier environmental assessment's failure to substantively address potential terrorist threats, and indications of an expanding range of operations, including aerosolized experiments (which are particularly dangerous, are closer to weaponized forms of bioagents, and were previously identified as barred at the Los Alamos facility).

✓ **To-Do: Concerned citizens must submit "scoping" comments by January 16.**

**NukeWatch's comments will be on our website no later than Wednesday, January 11.**

**Check them out at [www.nukewatch.org](http://www.nukewatch.org) and submit your own comments--every comment counts!!**



**nuclear watch** new mexico  
holiday '05-'06

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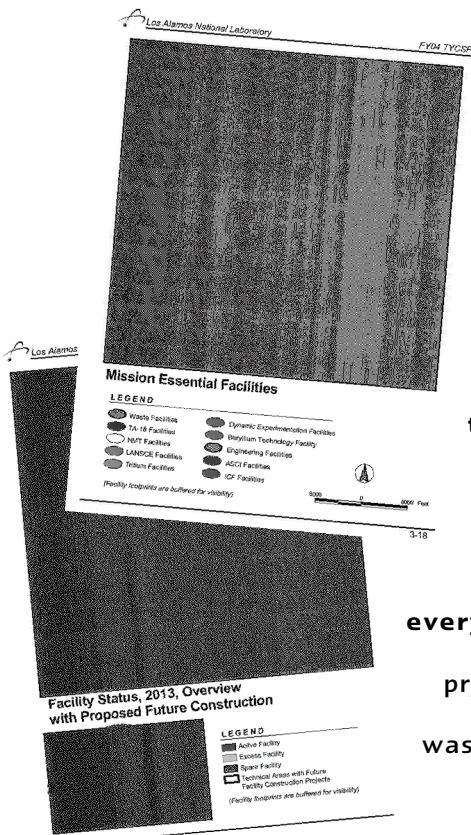
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**mission statement**

The mission of Nuclear Watch New Mexico is to provide timely and accurate information to the public on nuclear issues in the American Southwest, and to encourage effective citizen involvement and activism in these issues. We seek to promote greater environmental protection, safe disposition of radioactive wastes, and federal policy changes that will curb the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

***In this issue: Los Alamos Lab Corporate Takeover Kicks Off; State Gambles Dangerously with WIPP Waste; Looking Back and Ahead at the New Year; Good and Bad News about the Federal Nuclear Weapons Budget; Reliable Replacement Warhead Program--What's Wrong With It?; Two Inspiring Profiles; BioLab Update***

**you call this FREEDOM OF INFORMATION?**



With Los Alamos National Lab undergoing its first-ever corporate management takeover --(see our front page article)-- now might be a good time to see what kind of facilities and missions are planned for the coming years.

Will the lab further entrench into its own nuclear bunker, or will meaningful contributions be made by the nation's "best and brightest" into constructive and sustainable technologies? Will the contamination truly be cleaned up, or will it grow?

Here are a couple of sample pages from the Ten Year Plan we obtained through the Freedom of Information Act. Hmmm, looks like everything interesting about the future has been edited out...away from the prying eyes of anyone who might object to "nukes forever" with its on-going waste of money, brains and environment.

See our response to this "Freedom of Information" on page 2.



**nuclear watch new mexico**

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