

Presentation to the

Radioactive and Hazardous Materials Committee of the New Mexico Legislature

It is time to request a halt to plutonium pit production at LANL

[Greg Mello](#), [Los Alamos Study Group](#), August 21, 2023

Only he who knows the empire of might and knows how not to respect it is capable of love and justice...Thus it is that those to whom destiny lends might, perish for having relied too much upon it. (Simone Weil)

A new generation will have to be taught a new way of harmony, mutual respect, common interest, and love for each other and the planet. (Herman Agoyo)

We do not believe any group of men adequate enough or wise enough to operate without scrutiny or without criticism. We know that the only way to avoid error is to detect it, that the only way to detect it is to be free to inquire. We know that in secrecy error undetected will flourish and subvert. (Robert Oppenheimer)

Prior testimony and correspondence to this committee

- From our letter of August 7, 2023:

The main reason I am writing right now...is the proposed executive session with LANL and NNSA. In four prior presentations to this Committee I have stressed the important of transparency, and suggested various measures the Committee could take to increase transparency on the part of [NNSA] and [LANL]. Since few if any members of the Committee have active security clearances, none of the content of the proposed executive session will involve classified information. We note that in prior meetings of this committee we have attended, the LANL director and senior NNSA representatives have addressed the Committee in open session.

In our view this proposed executive session is a step backwards. It is outrageous. It makes the democratically-elected New Mexico Legislature appear lower in status and sovereignty than a government contractor. I think the real effect and political content of the proposed executive session is to reinforce the appearance of a subordinate role for the New Mexico Legislature.

- [Can we disentrall ourselves, and save our State?](#) (Nov 14, 2022).
- [Unprecedented weapons production mission at LANL threatens regional decline, loss of autonomy: what can this committee do?](#) (Nov 12, 2021); Nov 13 follow-up [letter](#) re NNSA/LANL transparency
- [“Waking the Wolf” – expansion of weapons development and production at LANL will lead to economic, social stagnation and decline, intractable environmental problems](#) (Sep 9, 2020)
- [Production expectations vs. site realities and worker safety at LANL](#) (Aug 15, 2018)

Selected LASG [press releases](#) since Nov 14, 2022, summarizing developments

- [GAO assessment of major NNSA projects finds major cost, schedule overruns](#), Aug 17, 2023
- [Los Alamos to metastasize as weapons mission outgrows site](#), Jul 17, 2023. Related: [DOE/NNSA Proposal for an Innovation Campus, Midtown Santa Fe](#), Oct 31, 2019.
- [NNSA cites Los Alamos National Laboratory for multiple "serious" plutonium safety violations in 2021 Violations show "significant lack of attention or carelessness" and have "high safety significance"](#), May 31, 2023
- [NNSA's effort to restart plutonium warhead "pit" production will cost more than the Manhattan Project](#), May 27, 2023
- [Schedule for \[Pit\] Production Slipping, Costs Increasing: NNSA's Strategy is Failing](#), Mar 22, 2023
- [Installation of "Base" Capability to Produce 30 \[Pits\] at Los Alamos To Be Delayed 4 Years, to 2030](#), Feb 3, 2023
- [GAO: NNSA's Huge Program to Build New \[Pits\] Lacks Detailed Schedule, Budget, and Scope of Work](#), Jan 12, 2023
- [Los Alamos lab "agenda:" novel nuclear weapons and new ways to use them, hypersonic nuclear weapons, new nuclear waste disposal facility, additional production missions, biosecurity "leadership," "proactive" counterintelligence](#), Nov 23, 2022

Madam Chair, Ranking Member, and Committee: Key Takeaways (I)

- This is the fifth time, over a five year period, that I have come before this Committee to share some of what I and my colleagues at the Study Group and in government have learned about NNSA's proposal to create industrial plutonium capabilities at LANL, primarily to manufacture pits. This will not be another data-rich presentation, but rather present conclusions and one proposed action.
- The Study Group is a non-partisan, non-ideological, policy research, consulting, and educational organization. We also educate, lobby, and learn from, Congress and executive branch officials.
- The Committee had the opportunity to demand a full environmental analysis *prior to* the NNSA decisions in September 2020 that have since created an increasing, multi-dimensional hazardous and radioactive materials crisis for the state. The environmental and social impacts, some of which are being discussed today, will continue to build and accrue until this mission is terminated.
- Pit production is an inherently “dirty” mission that has been assigned to LANL despite the site's many drawbacks due to political “pork-barrel” pressure and, as a senior LANL official once explained to us, in anticipation of political compliance and lack of regulatory rigor. This is called “pollution shopping.” Politically, it is a form of “Stockholm Syndrome.”
- This committee has not placed a high value on NNSA and LANL transparency or oversight, as today's executive session with NNSA and LANL officials demonstrates.

Key Takeaways (II)

- Much has however come to light in other venues, in congressional communications and through our own research and meetings with NNSA and contractors, members of Congress, committee staff, oversight bodies, and administration officials. We have organized, analyzed, summarized, and published this material for you and others, in effect augmenting your regrettably part-time, unpaid, and unstaffed efforts – hallmarks of a state that has largely given up on social advancement. Some conclusions can now be drawn.
- **We would like this Committee to write to the Secretary of Energy, NNSA Administrator, and four key congressional committee chairs and ranking members, requesting a halt to NNSA’s efforts to create a pit production facility at LANL. Central in this request should be the orderly termination of the Los Alamos Plutonium Pit Production Project (“LAP4,” DOE project 21-D-512), in FY24 and FY25 appropriations.**
- Such a halt would not impair safety improvements at LANL, nor would it impede LANL’s efforts to establish pit production at a level of 10 pits per year – which, while unnecessary and in our view undesirable, is funded separately. Neither would such a halt impair NNSA’s efforts to maintain, develop, and transmit pit production skills and technologies to a new generation of technicians for eventual use in South Carolina, if and when needed. We believe this is the best government policy from every perspective – environmental, safety, regional economic, transportation, fiscal (regional and national), social, and from the nuclear policy perspectives, “hawk,” “arms control,” and “dove.”

Key Takeaways (III)

- Meanwhile the Committee can observe that there has been no true economic development in the region as a result of enormous LANL spending, historically totaling in excess of \$140 billion in today's dollars and rising rapidly over the past 5 years. "Those who think LANL create economic development are people for whom 78 years of data are not enough."
- Spending money does not in itself create economic or social development. It can create growth, but growth has costs, which can be damaging on a net basis. LANL spending can and has distorted labor and housing markets and has incurred transportation, resource use, and waste handling externalities, exacerbated regional inequality, and stifled the imaginations of New Mexico political leaders. As rural development and public health advocate Carol Miller has rightly said, "LANL is our political heroin."
- The result has been a flagrant "failure to thrive," with New Mexico falling to last place among all U.S. states in terms of overall child well-being, a good measure of social development overall. Areas in LANL's "labor-shed" which ought to be benefitting, are among the worst in the state in terms of poverty, drug abuse, and social ills.
- Overcoming this social failure will require more creative, committed, bipartisan, urban-rural state government responses than we have yet seen. "Help" from LANL comes with implicit costs the region cannot afford to pay and is no substitute for the cooperative social contract we need.

Key Takeaways (IV)

- The reasons for LANL's failure to create economic development are many and include:
 - LANL's salaries are far too high relative to other local businesses and government institutions. LANL is a "black hole" for talent.
 - LANL does not produce useful goods or services. "Tech transfer" has been and will remain largely a mirage, an economic and social development strategy that "underachieves."
 - LANL-induced growth comes with high fiscal and "congestion" costs as well as market distortions, leaving non-LANL workers with less-affordable housing, longer commutes, and lower quality of life.
 - The nature of LANL's mission – improving nuclear "deterrence, i.e. threatened genocide or omnicide, using very dangerous materials that also require an extensive militarized and intrusive security apparatus – violates treaties the U.S. has signed and is a form of "reputational pollution" for the state and region. It also damages the moral tenor of the region, essential for a social contract, which in turn is required to overcome the erosive effects of predatory capitalism in a peripheral region.
 - LANL's national security missions require extensive secrecy, and lying, in its public statements. This lying usually takes the form of omitting the most important information or quietly re-defining the terms of discussion to mean something quite different from ordinary language. This secrecy creates, in Herman Agoyo's words, *a lack of public story and meaning*, around which meaning, traditions, productive vocations, and identity could otherwise constellate. LANL makes enormous efforts to fill the resulting "black hole" with empty corporate slogans.

In conclusion

Madam Chair and Members of the Committee: thank you for the opportunity to speak frankly to your Committee. My Study Group colleagues and I are grateful for your often-thankless work on behalf of the state and its people.

Further information on pit production can be found at https://lasg.org/MPF2/first_page.html and the pages linked from it. Particular attention can be directed toward the “featured” entries and [this recent presentation](#) in Los Alamos.

I will try to answer any questions you have now in the limited time available, and am available to follow up with any further questions for the record you may have.