

Labs Won't Get Extra \$47 Million

Budget Shows Old Funds Just Being Shifted Around

By John Fleck

JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

What looked like a \$47 million shot in the arm this year for beleaguered U.S. nuclear weapons laboratories when President Clinton released his economic package in February will not materialize.

Instead of getting new money for civilian research, Sandia and Los Alamos national laboratories will simply see some of their money shifted from one pocket to the other — from nuclear weapons work to civilian research and development.

When the \$47 million was announced in February, it was included in Clinton's "economic stimulus" program. A Department of Energy fact sheet said the money would be part of a department request for a supplemental appropriation from Congress this year — new 1993 money for the three nuclear weapons labs: Sandia and Los Alamos in New Mexico and Lawrence Livermore in California.

But when the request for the supplemental appropriation went to Capitol Hill in late February, the money for the labs was not included. Since then, Energy Department spokesmen have repeatedly declined to discuss the \$47 million.

But a Department of Energy budget document provided to members of Congress Monday shows the money is coming from the labs themselves, as a shift from their nuclear weapons research budget to their budget for "technology transfer."

Officials at the Department of Energy, where the decision about the money was made, did not return calls Tuesday.

In a statement issued Tuesday, Sen. Pete Domenici, R-N.M., criticized the DOE plan, calling the "new" \$47 million and an equal amount the DOE proposes to shift from weapons to commercial research "simply a shift of funding within the labs."

The question of the shift of nuclear weapons money is part of a larger debate over the labs' budgets and futures: Will growth in civilian research offset the decline in defense spending at Sandia and Los Alamos?

The DOE has proposed a 17-percent cut in the nuclear weapons budget for 1994, which department figures say could cost Sandia and Los Alamos more than 1,000 jobs next year.

Lab officials and state political leaders hope civilian money will grow enough to offset the losses, but Sen. Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M., said it is too soon to tell whether that will be the case.

"I think the honest answer is that it still remains to be seen," Bingaman said in a telephone interview Tuesday. "I don't think that we can say with final assurance that funding in other areas will be sufficient to compensate."

Domenici was more blunt.

In his statement, Domenici said the proposed 1994 DOE budget "overlooks the scientific expertise of the labs."

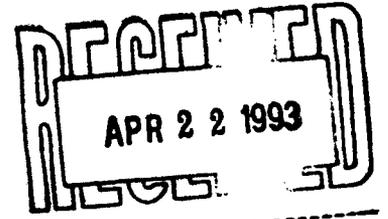
"To overlook these significant scientific and technical resources would undermine the president's determination to restore the nation's competitiveness and impede the necessary conversion from a defense to a civilian-oriented economy," Domenici said.

"While the president has talked many times about defense conversion, there isn't much in this budget for the lab employees who, I fear, may lose their jobs if Congress enacts the Clinton budget proposals," Domenici said.

Domenici's concern is that virtually all of Clinton's new civilian technology research and development money is being spent through other federal agencies, with little of the money going to the Department of Energy and its laboratories.

Sandia officials would not comment on the new budget numbers, saying they have not seen them yet. But they say they hope to avoid layoffs through attrition and by shifting defense workers to non-military research.

Officials at Los Alamos declined comment.



LANE General



Panel Hears Complaints About LANL

By Nancy Plevin

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

LOS ALAMOS — Members of a committee of University of California regents said Tuesday they found widespread misconceptions in northern New Mexico about work at Los Alamos National Laboratory.

The Committee on Oversight for the Department of Energy Laboratories, made up of seven regents, was in New Mexico to meet with Indian and community leaders five months after the university renewed a contract to operate the lab for five more years for the U.S. Department of Energy.

"There were a lot of very difficult issues discussed, and a lot of misconceptions I hope we can clear up in the future and continue to work with these people," said Meredith Khachigian, head of the regents.

The committee on Monday spent two hours with members of the Eight Northern Pueblos Council and held an open evening meeting with the 150 members of the community where they heard complaints about health hazards posed by the lab's nuclear weapons work and a lack of communication among citizens, Los Alamos officials and the university.

Concerning communication, Khachigian said, "I'm satisfied the lab is doing a really good job in this area. I'm not sure that a basic change will come out, but I think a change in perception is what is important here."

Clair Burgener, chairman of the oversight committee, said he recognized there are fears in the community that the lab is contributing to cancer and other diseases.

"We're trying to find a common scientific ground so we're all looking at the same set of facts," Bergener said. "Improving communications is a never-ending process."

Regents were told Monday the lab remains a vital part of the economic picture in northern New Mexico, but the time has come for it to phase out its work with nuclear weapons.

Typical of the critics in the crowd was Dr. Donald Kerlinsky of Albuquerque, a member of the group Physicians for Social Responsibility.

"The Cold War is over. We are not for closing the laboratory. But it's time to stop nuclear weapons research, design and testing," Kerlinsky said.

The committee usually visits laboratory officials every 18 months, but this time members wanted to get more public comments on the lab.

Earlier Monday, the regents met privately with the governors of New Mexico's eight northern pueblos. The session was not closed at the governors' request.

Greg Mello of the Los Alamos Study Group presented evidence that laboratory operations benefit affluent Los Alamos County far more than surrounding counties, such as Santa Fe and Rio Arriba.

But Española Mayor Richard Lucero told the committee if it weren't for the jobs provided by the laboratory, Española would have gone the way of other impoverished communities in northern New Mexico.

"We are happy we have the good jobs provided by Los Alamos," he said.

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