

General
**I will not tolerate continued security lapses
and a thumbing of their noses at Congress.”**

— REP. BART STUPAK, D-MICH.

Lawmakers: Lapses could spur lab's end

***House panel blasts 'tedious' Los Alamos
security problems***

(Santa Fe New Mexican 1-31) By Jennifer Talhelm

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Fed-up lawmakers on a House oversight committee said Tuesday that they want to strip a federal nuclear agency of its security responsibilities and threatened to shut down Los Alamos National Laboratory to correct a decade of security lapses there.

Rep. John Dingell, D-Mich., said he has sat through nearly a decade of hearings in which the Energy Department and the Northern New Mexico nuclear weapons lab have promised to fix security problems. "I've been hearing these promises for a long time, and they've become somewhat tedious," he said.

Lawmakers blistered the lab for its most recent security breach, in which a contract worker walked out with hundreds of pages of classified documents. The documents turned up during a drug raid last October involving a man who rented a room at the worker's home.

Rep. Joe Barton, R-Texas, said if problems cannot be solved this time, he will ask that the Los Alamos lab, the birthplace of the atomic bomb, be shut down. "There is an absolute inability and unwillingness to address the most routine security issues at this laboratory," Barton said.

Barton, Dingell and others on the House Energy and Commerce Committee intro-

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u Los Alamos lab disciplines 24 workers in connection with October security breach.

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Wednesday, January 31, 2007

LANL Hit Hard In Congress

By Michael Coleman

Journal Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON— Members of Congress berated Los Alamos National Laboratory on Tuesday for failing to protect America's nuclear secrets, and some suggested shutting the famous lab down.

Meanwhile, a powerful House Democrat introduced a bill to strip the National Nuclear Security Administration of its LANL oversight role.

Rep. John Dingell, a Michigan Democrat who heads the House Energy and Commerce Committee that monitors the national labs, said that giving NNSA lab oversight authority in 2000 was a mistake and his bill aims to correct it.

"The risk to security and safety is just too great for us to keep hoping that NNSA gets its act together," Dingell said. "This legislation effectively directs the Department of Energy to work aggressively and do the job that NNSA couldn't do."

Under Dingell's bill, lab oversight would revert to the Department of Energy, which he said would be more accountable than NNSA.

Rep. Joe Barton of Texas, the top Republican on the House energy panel, co-sponsored Dingell's bill Tuesday and harshly chastised LANL, where the atomic bomb was developed in the super-secret Manhattan Project during World War II, for repeated security breaches.

"If there was a way to start over, I'd say shut down the Los Alamos, fire everybody out there and build a new lab somewhere else," Barton said.

Tuesday's hearing marked the fifth time since 2003 that LANL's security lapses have come under a hot congressional glare.

The most recent congressional scrutiny came after classified materials— including electronic documents stored on a computer flash drive— were found in the home of a LANL subcontractor during an October drug investigation.

Dingell and Rep. Diana DeGette, a Colorado Democrat, both compared Tuesday's hearing to "Groundhog Day,"



the fictional film in which a weatherman experiences the same day over and over.

"This week is Groundhog Day, so it's appropriate we're having this hearing, but it's not funny," DeGette said, adding that recent security breaches at the northern New Mexico lab "are infuriatingly familiar."

Members of New Mexico's congressional delegation said Tuesday that LANL is much too important to shut down, but they also expressed frustration at the continued security lapses.

Rep. Tom Udall, a New Mexico Democrat whose district includes LANL, said in an interview that he was open to the idea of stripping NNSA of its lab watchdog role.

"From the beginning, I thought the NNSA was an additional layer of bureaucracy," Udall said. "What I'm hearing from employees and managers at Los Alamos is that this is causing more problems than it's solving.

"I think the NNSA gets in the way, in many cases, of good science," Udall added.

Sen. Pete Domenici, a New Mexico Republican who pushed for the NNSA's creation, said in a statement that the agency should retain its lab oversight role. He said stripping it "would merely restore all authority to the secretary of energy, or lead to the creation of yet another layer of bureaucracy at a department already choking from that very problem."

Sen. Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M., said Los Alamos is an indispensable part of America's national security.

"To suggest we could do without the lab is irresponsible and wrongheaded," Bingaman said in a statement.

The lab employs more than 12,000 full-time workers and contractors.

Some members of the committee and DOE officials suggested Tuesday that a consortium headed by the University of California, which manages LANL, could face stiff financial penalties for the continued security breaches.

Clay Sell, deputy secretary of energy and a former Domenici aide, told the subcommittee that closing Los Alamos would do more harm to national security than good. He said certain cutting-edge science, such as the construction of plutonium pits, can be done only at LANL.

"It's been suggested that we shoot the dog, and I have to reject that suggestion in the strongest possible terms," Sell said. "We need Los Alamos."

Rep. Bart Stupak, D-Mich., retorted: "Then they owe it to the American people to guard it."

Sell pointed out that Linton Brooks was recently fired as director of the National Nuclear Security Administration partly to send a message that the DOE is serious about making the weapons complex secure.

"It is going to take time to change, but we have an outstanding new leadership team in place," Sell said.

Udall said Michael Anastasio, LANL's new director, should be given a chance to turn the allegedly relaxed lab culture around.

"Let's give them a chance to get on top of this," Udall said. "There are two sides to it here. I think people know this is a very important laboratory and they do important work. I don't think they're going to throw the baby out with the bathwater."