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Energy and Commerce Leaders Want Los Alamos Employees Reinstated

WASHINGTON (January 17) - As part of their continuing investigation into alleged fraud and abuse at Los Alamos National Laboratory, House Energy and Commerce Committee Chairman Billy Tauzin (R-LA), along with Ranking Member John Dingell (D-MI), Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee Chairman James Greenwood (R-PA) and Subcommittee Ranking Member Peter Deutch (D-FL), today called on the University of California to reinstate two employees with back pay after they were fired recently under questionable circumstances.

(Attached below is a copy of the letter sent to University of California President Richard C. Atkinson.)

January 17, 2003

Dr. Richard C. Atkinson
President
University of California
Office of the President
1111 Franklin Street, 12th Floor
Oakland, CA 94607-5200

Dear Dr. Atkinson

As you know, the Committee on Energy and Commerce is undertaking an investigation into allegations of misuse of Federal funds and property at the Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL). We are writing to you today regarding the situation of Mr. Glenn Walp and Mr. Steven Doran, two former Laboratory Security Division employees who were terminated after raising concerns about LANL's handling of such allegations.

Subsequent to those terminations, on December 24, 2002, Secretary Spencer Abraham of the U.S. Department of Energy wrote to you to express his serious concerns over "on-going issues with management and security" at LANL. Secretary Abraham said that his

most immediate concern was "the events surrounding the dismissal of Mr. Walp and Mr. Doran, their allegations of cover-up concerning matters that they were investigating, and their allegations that their dismissal has precluded investigation of additional matters that are, therefore, going unaddressed." The Secretary concluded that "the inescapable conclusion is that the actions relating to Mr. Walp and Mr. Doran reflect a systemic management failure, one for which the Laboratory management must be held accountable."

Notably, Mr. Walp and Mr. Doran were fired on the very day that a special University of California panel headed by Dr. Bruce Darling was on the premises at LANL to conduct a one-day review of the allegations raised by these two men. In notes obtained by the Committee, it appears that this panel was informed of these questionable terminations on that day, but took no action to either question or stop them.

Since that time -- and as a direct result of the matters brought by Mr. Walp and Mr. Doran to the attention of you, the Department of Energy, and this Committee -- the Laboratory's director and deputy director have resigned. Further, the director and deputy director of the Laboratory's Security Division, who supervised Mr. Walp and Mr. Doran and played key roles in their terminations, have been removed, although not terminated. The Laboratory's director of audits and assessments, who is responsible for investigating allegations of misuse of Federal funds and violations of Federal orders and regulations, has been removed as well, although not terminated. In addition, we have learned that two team leaders responsible for managing programs in which incidents of theft occurred have been removed from their positions, although not terminated. Yet despite these removals and resignations, there were generous words of praise by the University of California for many of these people, and all of them have been or will be given other positions at the Laboratory with continuing salary and benefits.

It is both ironic and sad that the only people who are now without a job and health and other benefits are the individuals who tried to correct the fraud problems at LANL, while those who either permitted or ignored the problems continue to be gainfully employed at their old salaries with full benefits. Mr. Walp and Mr. Doran were hired after a nationwide search for law enforcement personnel to work at Los Alamos. Mr. Walp was even given a large signing bonus. Both of them moved within the past year to New Mexico based on representations made by Laboratory personnel that they needed to make changes in the way the Laboratory conducted its Security Division. They are now left with no income, no benefits, and the cost of moving to whatever location in which they will find their next employment. They are in the process of exhausting their savings and going into debt. And until this week, no one in the upper-management of the Laboratory or the University of California had made arrangements to even talk to these individuals about their terminations or to provide any assistance to them in any way.

It has now been almost two months since Mr. Walp and Mr. Doran were fired, and one month since Secretary Abraham wrote his letter, yet according to news reports about the recent University of California Board of Regents meeting, you have "no information on which to base whether the firings were appropriate." Mr. Walp and Mr. Doran have done

a great service to the Laboratory, the Department, and the country, but to date the University of California's treatment of them has been appalling. We strongly encourage you to promptly undertake an investigation into whether they were wrongfully terminated and to come to a speedy resolution of this situation that is fair to all parties. In the meantime, we believe that -- given the unique fact that those responsible for Mr. Walp's and Mr. Doran's terminations were promptly removed or forced to resign from their own duties due at least in part to their questionable handling of such terminations -- these two men should be immediately reinstated and placed on paid administrative leave, with back pay through the date of their terminations, until an appropriate final agreement has been reached between Mr. Walp and Mr. Doran and the University. Lab employees under investigation for wrongdoing are accorded such compensation, and Mr. Walp and Mr. Doran certainly should not receive any lesser treatment. Your failure to take these actions will make it very difficult for this Committee to view seriously your statements that you intend to change the culture of secrecy at LANL, and will serve as yet another reminder to the thousands of hard-working LANL personnel that those who try to do what is right will only be punished for it.

We thank you for your consideration of this matter, and await your prompt reply.

Sincerely,

W.J. "Billy" Tauzin
Chairman

John D. Dingell
Ranking Member

James C. Greenwood, Chairman
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations

Peter Deutsch, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations

cc: The Honorable Spencer Abraham, Secretary
U.S. Department of Energy
Mr. Steven Doran
Mr. Glenn Walp

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