

PRESS RELEASES OF SENATOR PETE DOMENICI

Domenici's Open Letter to Los Alamos

Thursday, July 22, 2004

WASHINGTON -- U.S. Senator Pete Domenici today released the following open letter to the people of Los Alamos:

July 22, 2004

To the Community of Los Alamos:

One of the greatest honors of my life has been the opportunity to represent the people of Los Alamos in the U.S. Senate. You have shaped my career as I have pursued committee assignments such as the Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development of which I am now the chairman that largely funds the laboratory. It has been the experts at Los Alamos on matters ranging from nuclear weapons to the human genome that have sparked some of my most passionate efforts in the Senate and, as a result, have created national programs ranging from science-based stockpile stewardship and nonproliferation programs to brain imaging and human health.

However, over time, I have increasingly found myself expending considerable effort not in extolling the virtues of Los Alamos, but in defending the laboratory and the University in particular from its critics. I have been successful; the budgets continue to grow, and the programs and people at the laboratory are secure.

I have found myself increasingly defending the laboratory for failures of basic management; human resources policies, procurement, project management, inventory control, and security. While critics have carped, I have worked to ensure that none of the attacks harmed the laboratory, but that effort has come at great cost.

Unfortunately, that defense has increasingly cost the credibility of the laboratory. Today, in Washington, Los Alamos' reputation as a crown jewel of science is being eclipsed by a reputation as being both dysfunctional and untouchable.

I do not yet know if the most recent security incident is, unto itself, of great consequence. But I can tell you that the analogy of the straw that breaks the camel's back is appropriate. These sorts of things, which engender a lack of confidence in not just the laboratory's management but also every one of its employees, must end. As the proudest defender of the laboratory, I can tell you that the defense can no longer be sustained unless the laboratory changes.

Director Nanos and Deputy Secretary McSlarrow understand the situation. I have read reports of people who think they are making a bigger deal out of this than they should. Let me tell you as forcefully as possible that Nanos and McSlarrow get it. They know the magnitude of the stakes this time, and I completely support their efforts.

Please understand the burden that is upon each employee of the laboratory. It will take years to reestablish Los Alamos' reputation. Any stumble will be a revalidation of the critics and undermine all of our good efforts. Los Alamos National Laboratory must maintain the highest standards for technology and science, and also integrity among its employees. With that understanding, I call on those responsible for this most recent incident to come forth to admit their errors so we can move forward.

Sincerely,

Pete V. Domenici

United States Senator

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