

Remarks prepared for Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham
Los Alamos National Laboratory
Los Alamos, NM
October 14, 2004

Thank you all for being here today. I am very glad to be back at Los Alamos. Let me thank Pete Nanos and the Lab's leadership team for their stewardship of this facility.

The world knows that history was made at Los Alamos. Civilization was saved by men and women who here took on an enormous challenge and – with the sand running out of the hourglass – solved a scientific riddle that many thought impossible.

It is no exaggeration to say that the work here brought an end to the Second World War ... and helped America win the Cold War.

But this lab isn't a museum. We don't rest on the laurels of past accomplishment here.

Los Alamos has a present-day mission, and is a vital part of America's ever-continuing national security efforts.

Our nation can't rely merely on the weapons systems, the science, the strategies that won those earlier conflicts.

We must constantly come up with new defense systems and new strategies, relying on the latest and newest science, to protect this country's national security against any and all challenges we might face.

At the same time, we must constantly advance the physics, the chemistry, the math and biological and computational science that will push the limits of fundamental scientific research.

What that means for Los Alamos, steeped as we are in the history and accomplishment of people like Oppenheimer and Bradbury, is that we must prove ourselves each and every day.

I think that Los Alamos does a great job of that.

Just a few weeks ago I was proud to announce that three Los Alamos scientists – Bette Korber, Fred Mortensen, and Greg Swift – were among the seven 2004 winners of the E.O. Lawrence Award.

That is what I mean by being forced to prove ourselves ... and then going out and doing it.

Ladies and gentlemen, I recognize that the past few months have not been easy for any of us.

It is not the sort of thing any one of us would want to go through again.

Though headquarters is more than 1600 miles away, I have been closely monitoring the situation here on a personal level.

And I wanted to come here to share my views with you.

First, I fully support Pete's decision to suspend work and to take strong disciplinary action to address those few who thought they didn't need to follow the rules.

These were tough decisions.

But they were the right ones if we are to get our problems worked out and restore confidence in our operations here.

Demonstrating our total commitment to excellence is the only way to guarantee to the American people that Los Alamos science will continue to be the envy of the nation and the world ... and that we are up to the task of handling the nation's most sensitive plans and secrets.

And if we fall short in that effort, believe me, we will have *real* problems.

In Washington, I frequently hear from people who are very concerned about what is happening here.

And some of them have very different ideas for Los Alamos and the other facilities.

The most benign suggestions involve curtailing work here; others are more draconian.

Let me be emphatic: I strenuously disagree with those suggestions.

But what I am saying to you today is that if we fail to take adequate measures to address the situation, it may lead to one of these outcomes, no matter how strenuously I or any other DOE leaders – present or future – resist.

Your help in all this is indispensable.

You must give us the tools to make the case for Los Alamos.

We can't just rely on the great science this facility is known for.

We have to present a track record on science, security, and safety that answers every criticism and precludes future ones.

This is today's challenge.

And it is not just a challenge for me or for future Energy Secretaries. It is a challenge shared by all of you, by the University of California, by Director Nanos, by NNSA, by DOE.

We are in this boat together. And only by working constructively together will we succeed.

I know that the criticisms bother you.

I assure you they bother me too, and I want to show the critics they are wrong.

Like you, I want this lab to thrive and to grow.

But in order for that to happen, we must not lose the confidence of those who, ultimately, will make decisions affecting the future of this institution.

That said, let me also make it clear that I think we are on the right track.

One reason I came here today is because I thought it important to tell you that personally.

The steps we have taken in recent months, difficult as they have been, are an indication of our seriousness about seeing Los Alamos through another half century and beyond.

By re-focusing on safety, security, and compliance, we are re-focusing on the future of this facility.

Safety ... security ... compliance are integral to what we do, and what every scientist does.

The reasons for focusing attention in these areas are manifest.

First, we want to ensure the safety of everyone who works here.

Second, we don't want to spend months of valuable research time repairing broken equipment, or reallocating funds to repair that equipment.

Perhaps even more important, consider the responsibilities this lab, and our Department, bear.

We are the stewards of the nation's most important secrets, and most dangerous weapons and materials.

Our responsibilities, therefore, are directly related to the safety and security not just of each person working at DOE facilities, but of every American citizen.

Maintaining the nuclear weapons stockpile ... coordinating global nonproliferation efforts ... helping thwart nuclear terrorism throughout the world.

With responsibilities such as these there can be no room for error.

This philosophy must guide our day-to-day safety and security efforts throughout the Department.

Indeed, the steps you are taking here will result in critical Department-wide improvements, because many of the problems you have identified are ones confronted by nearly every other facility in the complex and at headquarters.

Whether it's the investments you are making in your red network, identifying risks, establishing CREM libraries and tighter controls on all classified information – each of these actions is certain to help everyone in DOE and NNSA to focus effectively on the right problems and to seek the right solutions.

And they are certain to let all of us get back to fully focusing on the science and national security work that is the fundamental basis for our existence in a timely fashion.

I firmly believe we have turned the corner. We are on the right track.

And I want to commend Pete, the rest of the Lab's management, and all of you for the steps you are taking.

I realize that my remarks so far have dealt to a large degree with problems at Los Alamos.

Obviously we need to address them.

But I didn't come here today just to talk about problems. I also want to talk to you about the positive things Los Alamos does and for which it is known worldwide.

I want to talk about the scientific feats that routinely come out of this laboratory.

Most importantly, I want to talk to you about our commitment to Los Alamos science.

And so just as I have discussed the steps we need to take regarding safety and security, I now want to focus on the steps we need to enhance and improve the scientific work of the Lab.

To start, I have instructed Deputy Secretary McSlarrow and NNSA Administrator Brooks to work with you on ways to identify and support creative scientific ideas, ideas that may have high risk but, also, have high potential for return.

And I have instructed them to address the subject of retaining talent at labs like Los Alamos.

I recognize that we operate in a competitive environment, and I believe it is important to offer the facilities, the funding, and the salaries that will make the top minds want to come here and want to *stay* here.

These efforts will only complement what is already going on here in terms of scientific achievement and the enhancement of our science programs.

In particular, I am proud of such recent achievements as:

- the three winners of the Lawrence Award I mentioned a moment ago.
- the five R&D 100 Awards Los Alamos took in this year.
- the recent groundbreaking announcement that Los Alamos had grown a world record-length four-centimeter-long, single-wall carbon nanotube.
- the Lab's recent advancements in nanotechnology that might boost the carrying capacity of superconducting wires and tapes by as much as *200 to 500 percent* in motors and generators

- and, at the other end of the size spectrum, Los Alamos's pioneering research into how giant planets are formed

And building on these achievements are the recent actions you have taken to ensure the preeminence of Los Alamos science in the 21st century.

I am proud of the efforts under way to reduce the cost of doing business.

I commend Pete's commitment to pushing science to the fore in making decisions that impact the ability to do research.

And I applaud the establishment of a chief science officer for Los Alamos who reports to the director.

Tom Bowles has hit the ground running in his efforts to shore up the Laboratory's science base, particularly with regard to small-scale science.

These are all steps in the right direction.

They are the actions of a lab that is showing its commitment, its seriousness, and its determination even in the face of adversity.

The future of this institution rests in our hands.

First and foremost, it depends on the dedicated men and women here.

It also depends on the strong support of our Department and from me personally, and I can assure you that you have it.

All of us envision a future for this Laboratory every bit as bright as its past.

All of us anticipate Los Alamos playing the same, central role in our national security efforts over the next fifty years ... that it has played for the last half-century.

All of us hope that when people think about world-class science, cutting-edge experimentation, and ground-breaking research, they will always think immediately of Los Alamos ... as they have done since the days of the Manhattan Project.

Based on the last few months, I have every reason to believe it will happen.

Because of your efforts, I am confident the problems we have experienced will soon be behind us.

Because of your commitment, Los Alamos will continue practicing the world's greatest science protecting America.

Because of your dedication, Los Alamos will continue its impressive accumulation of scientific honors and its publication of groundbreaking journals.

Because of Los Alamos, America will remain safe.

And because of your selfless devotion to your jobs and the steadfastness with which you accept your responsibilities, I am certain that the Los Alamos the world has come to know for the last half century will endure, and I am convinced the glory days of this facility lie ahead.

Thank you.