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ONE HUNDRED TENTH CONGRESS

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Energy and Commerce
Washington, DC 20515-6115

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March 27, 2007

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The Honorable Jeff Bingaman
United States Senate
703 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Byron L. Dorgan
United States Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Pete V. Domenici
United States Senate
328 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mark Udall
Member of Congress
100 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Senators Bingaman, Domenici, and Dorgan, and Rep. Udall:

Thank you for your letter of March 6, 2007, requesting a delay in the Government Accountability Office (GAO) investigation of Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL).

As you correctly note in your letter, Los Alamos plays a critical role in our national security. For that reason we have been deeply concerned by the long history of security failures, safety breaches, and mismanagement at LANL.

Despite repeated promises and assurances of reform and the reshuffling of management last year, testimony at the most recent hearing of the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations of the Committee on Energy and Commerce revealed that security problems at Los Alamos are continuing. At the hearing held on January 30, 2007, the Director of the Department of Energy's Office of Health, Safety and Security testified that "our recent oversight inspection resulted in the worst set of performance ratings for safeguards, security, cyber security and emergency management collectively that we have seen at the Los Alamos Laboratory in many years." Moreover, with respect to the most recent removal of some 1,600 pages of classified documents from LANL, the DOE Inspector General concluded that, "the full extent of damage or dispersion of classified material may never be known."


The Honorable Jeff Bingaman
The Honorable Pete V. Domenici
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The Honorable Mark Udall
Page 2

The national security failures at Los Alamos are a matter of the utmost urgency. The work we have asked GAO to perform will assist us, and the new management at Los Alamos, by providing some basic and necessary information: an inventory of all major programs, activities and services performed at LANL; an evaluation of how the Los Alamos National Security, LLC (LANS) and the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) can reduce and consolidate the volume of classified material and the security footprint at LANL to make it more manageable, including whether it is feasible to move classified activities to other weapons laboratories where there is a better track record with respect to security; and an examination of the basis upon which NNSA, as part of Project 2030 (restructuring the nuclear weapons complex) is making restructuring decisions.

The GAO study will not interfere with any steps LANS may be taking to improve security and GAO has proven time and again in its oversight of Executive Branch agencies that it is capable of conducting its work in the least disruptive manner possible. Performance audits conducted by GAO over the years have proven valuable tools for assisting the Congress and Executive Branch to perform our professional and public responsibilities.

With best wishes,

Sincerely,



JOHN D. DINGELL
CHAIRMAN



JOE BARTON
RANKING MEMBER

cc: The Honorable Bart Stupak, Chairman
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations
Committee on Energy and Commerce

The Honorable Ed Whitfield, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations
Committee on Energy and Commerce