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House Committee Slams Security at Los Alamos

Santa Fe, NM - - Today the House Energy and Commerce Committee released the first part of a two-part report by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) on persistent security problems at the Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL). In a scathing press release, Committee Chairman Rep. John Dingell (D.MI) observed, “World War II was prosecuted in less time than it is taking DOE and its contractor to bring a robust security system into force at this nuclear weapons lab.”

Rep. Joe Barton (R-TX), the Committee’s ranking member, commented, “Regrettably, the security problems at Los Alamos no longer seem to shock and appall. A dozen hearings by the Energy and Commerce Committee revealed, confirmed and reconfirmed that the lab was run more like a corner hamburger stand than the crown jewel of the nation’s nuclear weapons program. Most frustrating was a culture that treated America’s nuclear secrets like leftover napkins.”

The Committee’s press release noted, “Security lapses have been recognized at LANL since the 1980s, and all the good intentions and promises in the world didn’t seem capable of fixing them.” In contrast, the GAO report recommends that “the national lab develop a strategic security plan that focuses on improving security program effectiveness and addresses all identified security weaknesses, and that it develop a plan that takes an integrated view of physical and cyber security.”

Jay Coghlan, Executive Director for Nuclear Watch New Mexico, commented, “Money should be taken away from unneeded nuclear weapons production at Los Alamos and given to ever increasing efforts to improve security. We echo GAO’s call for holding LANL’s contractor strictly accountable for achieving uncompromising security, while giving it the financial incentives to do so. Instead of making weapons, make nuclear designs and materials secure.”

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The House Energy and Commerce press release is available at http://energycommerce.house.gov/Press_110/110nr315.shtml

The GAO’s report “Long-Term Strategies Needed to Improve Security and Management Oversight” is available at <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d08694.pdf>