

My Turn

Are we Taoseños or LANL communities?

BY SUZIE SCWARTZ

The Taos News, 12/20/2018

The Regional Coalition of LANL Communities, formed in 2011, describes itself as being “comprised of nine cities, counties and pueblos surrounding the Department of Energy’s Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL).”

In early 2018, a scandal surrounding financial mishandling and illegal spending of taxpayer dollars by the obscure entity, the Regional Coalition of LANL Communities , provided an opportunity for the Coalition to make its governing document agree with its mission statement. The RCLC board had been directed to work on revising the document, the joint powers agreement, at that meeting.

A group of citizens submitted a letter requesting that changes be made. Taos Regional Coalition Board member Darien Fernandez, who had promised to read the letter and champion his constituents’ requests, wasn’t able to attend the April 27 meeting due to his responsibilities as Taos County Democratic Party chair and the letter was never read.

Key to the citizen requests was “removal of the clause, 2 A.(ii) “advocacy of long-term stable funding for LANL missions.” ‘LANL missions’ is code for nuclear weapons production activities, expanded plutonium pit production in particular. “Pits” are the cores used for detonating nuclear warheads.

The Regional Coalition board promised that all nine member communities would be allowed to review the revisions prior to finalizing changes, but they broke their promise. The revised joint powers agreement simply reappeared on the RCLC website at some point with no public review. Clause 2A(ii) remains intact.

Few people are aware of how much money LANL receives for nuclear weapons activities, but it’s a lot.

The Fiscal Year 2019 LANL congressional budget request contains nearly \$2 billion of taxpayer money, or 71 percent of its total request for “plutonium sustainment,” aka, expanded plutonium ‘pit’ production. The remaining 29 percent is divided up for nuclear nonproliferation 10.3 percent, work for others 9.31 percent, environmental cleanup 7.0 percent and only 2.5 percent for all other sciences combined. On May 10, the Albuquerque

Journal quoted outgoing LANL Director Terry Wallace’s praise for the FY 2019 LANL congressional budget request; “The lab welcomes the NNSA’s decision to

continue full-scale production of plutonium pits at Los Alamos National Laboratory and to invest in a surge capability at the Laboratory to maximize pit production. This commitment by the government to expand our plutonium mission reiterates the critical role we play in ensuring the nation's security—and pit manufacturing is central to that.”

In addition to the Department of Energy's spectacular funding for nuclear weapons production, the regional coalition itself is funded by about \$200,000 a year of federal and local taxpayer money. About \$100,000 comes from the DOE and \$60,000 from Los Alamos County. Taos and Taos County each pay

\$3,500 per year. These dollar amounts, the joint powers agreement and Wallace's testimony demonstrate that if you are an RCLC member, you support nuclear weapons expansion and the new cold war.

To their credit, Taos and Taos County have a history of supporting nuclear nonproliferation, and opposing pit production. But this was prior to the formation of the RCLC in 2011.

The RCLC's language, “works in partnership to create one voice to ensure national decisions incorporate local needs and concerns,” may seem benign, but if its member governments were to begin speaking with “one voice” about the necessity of reducing the US stockpile and eliminating nuclear weapons production at LANL, thereby halting the production of new radioactive and hazardous waste, and urging the Lab to transition to peaceful and sustainable sciences, I am quite sure that that's not the “one voice” that is intended, and the RCLC would quickly cease to exist.

In August 2018, Mayor Dan Barrone signed Taos onto the sweeping new 2018 Mayors For Peace resolution “calling on the Administration to step back from the brink and exercise global leadership in preventing nuclear war.”

But it is hypocritical for the town to be a member of Mayors For Peace and a member of the regional coalition at the same time. Membership in MFP cost only \$19/year, a membership to be proud of.

In this time of heightened global nuclear tensions, Taos should lead Northern New Mexico by withdrawing from the RCLC and strengthening and renewing its commitment to peaceful and sustainable futures by adopting new resolutions calling for an end to nuclear weapons activities at LANL, expanded funding for comprehensive cleanup, nonproliferation, climate science and a swift transition to peaceful and sustainable sciences.

Please contact your RCLC board members, council member Fernandez, Mayor Barrone, and county commissioner Gallegos. Let them know you do not support nuclear weapons production at LANL or anywhere else. We are Taoseños, not LANL communities. Withdraw us from the RCLC.

Suzie Schwartz is a resident of Taos County.