



Los Alamos National Laboratory Fellows Position on the University of California Contract

February 6, 2003

LA-UR-03-915

Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) has a compelling primary mission, which is to apply cutting-edge scientific research and technology to ensure a secure future for our nation. The Laboratory's main assets to accomplish these goals include some of the world's finest research facilities, and some of the world's top scientists, working at the frontiers of their scientific fields.

The recent charges of purchasing scandals and financial mismanagement at LANL have been particularly disturbing to the vast majority of hard-working and dedicated LANL employees. Investigations by Congress and the Department of Energy followed by prompt corrective actions are crucial for restoring public confidence. Yet, care must be taken that those corrections, while necessary, do not harm the central mission of the Laboratory.

The greatest challenge to LANL's long-term success has been and will continue to be the ability to attract and retain the technical staff in our relatively isolated locale. The Laboratory staff have long valued the connection with a great research university, the University of California, for maintaining the commitment to intellectual achievement, and for providing an academic authenticity with a unique channel to the international science community. Recent events have not suggested difficulties with LANL's scientific productivity and its ability to carry out its primary mission. With respect to our central mission, management of the Laboratory by the University of California over the past 60 years, a period that has included our development of the fission bomb that ended World War II, and the fusion bomb that provided our nuclear deterrent during the Cold War, has been an undeniable success.

Within the coming weeks, new ideas will be proposed to correct the mismanagement problems that are presently under investigation. One must be careful to avoid risks that these proposals may present with respect to the Laboratory's main mission. A major concern is the morale of our fellow employees, which already has been stressed by the extensive adverse publicity of recent events. Everyone believes that actions to correct recent management failures should be taken. But, the last thing that LANL employees want now is even more uncertainty, whether related to the degree of future commitment to a work atmosphere conducive to scientific and

technical progress, or to the threat, whether perceived or real, to their benefit and retirement packages.

We believe that management of LANL by one of the top research universities is essential for attracting and retaining the world's best scientists and for continuing the success of the Laboratory in its important mission of providing a secure future for our nation. Furthermore, we are convinced that no other such institution is better able to oversee the nation's nuclear design laboratories than the University of California.

The long history of association between Los Alamos and UC is especially valuable because of the unique nature of and restrictions on nuclear weapons design and assessment. The management and technical staff at both Los Alamos and Livermore are currently addressing significant technical challenges that must be surmounted to support the nation's nuclear deterrent without nuclear testing. Replacing UC would create a significant and extended disruption of that and other important work conducted at the Laboratory.

We, the Fellows of Los Alamos National Laboratory, believe that to be separated from the University of California would be a serious and irreversible mistake, and a major risk to our scientific future. Based on these considerations, we strongly support the continuing role of the University of California as the DOE contractor for LANL.