Operation Commonsense

April 22, 1996
DOE Hearing

THE LESSONS OF HISTORY

Five years ago the business community rallied for an event that was to hail a revival for the business fortunes of the Texas Panhandle. Hundreds of supporters and advocates of an enlarged Pantex paraded to the Civic Center, where boosters promised the crowd an expanded Pantex plant and 10,000 to 15,000 new jobs.

Local newspapers heralded the event as a spearhead for an economic renaissance and noted the unqualified and total support from the community. As details of the expanded operations were disclosed, a more sober appraisal revealed that some of the missions might be less than desirable and others far too risky for reasonable people, concerned with the area's long term best interest, to consider. Now after five years we know that not only did 10,000 jobs never materialize, no new jobs materialized and in fact Pantex has announced a cut back in jobs beginning in 1998. Wisely, the community decided not to tie its future to Pantex and now our economy is reponding nicely and there is every reason to believe this economic progress will continue.

Today this community is a better more informed community. Despite hundred of thousands of dollars spent by the city on a public relations campaign intended to scare residents into unconditional support for Pantex, citizens have developed a more cautionary approach, recognizing the important differences and distinctions in various missions considered for the plant. The often repeated scare tactics warning that Pantex is closing and Amarillo will quickly be a ghost town fall are no longer working and reasonable people have decided that some work at Pantex is fine and other work, like plutonium reprocessing, is unacceptable.

The day is gone when issues surrounding Pantex fit neatly into simplistic categories of "for Pantex or against it". Most of us support Pantex. The issues today surrounding future missions at Pantex are multi-layered issues often requiring technical, scientific and public policy inputs. While generally the local community supports disassembly and interim storage, the public is more ambivalent towards longer term storage and high explosive burning, and a clear majority are flat against plutonium reprocessing. 1/08.03.01

Plutonium processing has a long and troubled history in this country. The Scientific American Magazine, in the current month's issue, reports that Hanford Washington, only one site where processing took place, has spent $9 billion dollars thus far on cleanup and will spend one billion dollars per year for the next 40 years on additional cleanup work. The job currently employs 14,000 workers and is the largest civilian project in our country's history with cleanup representing more than one third of the DOE budget. Whether it is Rocky Flats

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The Department of Energy acknowledges the commentor's opposition to new missions at Pantex. Decisions on storage and disposition of weapons-usable fissile materials will be based upon environmental analyses, technical and economic studies, national policy considerations, and public input.

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or Hansford the story is always the same – total contamination of the sites and surrounding areas including damage to people, water, air and land. DOE call these areas "national sacrifice areas". We don't want to become a national sacrifice area.

The message here is simple. People are not prepared to sign off on a "anything goes" mentality. We are certainly not ready to be the national guinea pig for untested plutonium reprocessing technologies that have contaminated every site in the country and now require billions of dollars a year to restore and will continue to do so over the next few decades. We are not ready to sacrifice our quality of life, our agricultural assets, and our safety for a short term economic boost. 1/08.03.01 cont.

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