

were urging the Department to defer decisions on facility construction and relocation until stockpile questions had been resolved.²⁹¹

The Department, even so, continued to move ahead with the Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) for Reconfiguration of the Nuclear Weapons Complex begun under President Bush. Analyzing the environmental consequences of long-term configuration strategies, the PEIS would lay the basis for a record of decision on the size and shape of the future complex. Critical was the question of where plutonium would be stored and possibly fabricated into "pits" for warheads, the latter previously a function performed at Rocky Flats. Among other alternatives, the Department was considering developing a plutonium "supersite" for storage and processing. One likely location was the Nevada Test Site. "We're not talking about a shiny new weapons factory," observed Richard Mah, director of reconfiguration planning at Los Alamos. "Plutonium is unstable. We have it in ingots, oxides, metal; you'll need a new plutonium processing facility to convert plutonium from one form to another. Once you have that, the manufacturing part is trivial."²⁹²

O'LEARY AND OPENNESS: BREAKING THE SILENCE

Secretary O'Leary's year-long quest to overturn the Department of Energy's old culture climaxed when she launched her "openness initiative" at a press conference on December 7, 1993. Before an overflow audience in the auditorium of the Forrestal building, the Department's headquarters in Washington, O'Leary announced that, as part of President Clinton's commitment to a more open government, the Department was taking the first step in lifting "the veil of Cold War secrecy." The initial step consisted of releasing previously classified material. O'Leary described it as "the biggest delivery of declassified material in the history of this department." The secretary passed out a large packet of fact sheets revealing that one-fifth of the Nation's nuclear weapons tests had been kept secret, identifying locations and quantities of weapons grade plutonium, providing information about fusion energy,

and documenting the large quantities of mercury used in weapons production. O'Leary committed the Department to releasing additional material within six months. She also provided examples of how the Department was becoming a more open agency. These included encouraging whistleblowers and providing information on human plutonium experiments.²⁹³

Termed "breaking the silence," O'Leary's openness initiative focused on the declassification and release of information. The initiative had four goals: 1) the reduction of the amount of classified information, particularly that related to environmental, safety, and health issues, 2) the speed-up of the Department's declassification process in accordance with priorities developed with stakeholder input, 3) the review of classification policies to make them consistent with national security needs in the post-Cold War era, and 4) the establishment of an interagency process for expediting declassification and release of shared information. The Department estimated its classified documents at some 32 million pages, which if stacked would reach about 3.3 miles. Noting the paucity of resources to face the monumental task ahead, O'Leary pledged that the Department would "make improvements to give the public as much information as possible without compromising national security." Symbolically, this meant changing the name of the Department's Office of Classification to the Office of Declassification. Substantively, it meant tripling the size of the Office of Declassification's staffing.²⁹⁴

Whatever direction the Department thought it would take, the openness initiative soon assumed a life of its own. O'Leary's press conference generated considerable media attention, most of it favorable and, at least initially, focused on the previously secret weapons tests. Attention quickly turned, however, to the issue of radiation experiments on humans, such as the plutonium injection program begun near the end of World War II. Despite the fact that some of this information had been publicly released years and even decades earlier, the media seized on the issue. As information and misinformation on radiation experiments and informed-consent issues