

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

JANUARY 26, 2001

DOMENICI WANTS REVIEW COMMITTEE TO WEIGH POLYGRAPH BENEFITS TO DOE LAB SECURITY

WASHINGTON -- U.S. Senator Pete Domenici today reiterated his concerns that polygraph tests mandated as a means of improving security at the Energy Department's national laboratories may ultimately be counterproductive.

Domenici today deployed his science advisor, Dr. Pete Lyons, to represent him at the debut meeting of the Committee to Review the Scientific Evidence on the Polygraph. This panel was created through a congressional directive to the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) to conduct a comprehensive study and investigation into the scientific validity of polygraph as a screening tool for federal personnel.

"I have very strong concerns over the excessive use of polygraphs, and I want to know if the scientific basis for polygraphs substantiates their use as a broad and intrusive screening tool for the laboratory workforce," Domenici said.

Domenici is chairman of the Senate Energy and Water Development Appropriations Subcommittee that is the primary source of funding for DOE and its national laboratories.

"I know from visiting with lab workers and administrators that the questionable scientific validity of these tests, which are known to give false positives, is a demoralizing factor that affects recruitment and retention. We need measurable assurances that the polygraphs truly enhance the overall security at the labs," Domenici said.

"I hope the work of this committee, backed by the NAS, will give us an objective analysis of polygraphs, and help determine the necessity for widespread polygraph testing," he said. "My understanding is that lab workers do not object to intrusive tests that have scientific basis. For example, the drug tests required of some lab employees are not contentious because they are scientifically credible. Polygraphs need to meet the same litmus test before they enjoy such acceptance."

With the passage of the FY2001 Defense Authorization Bill last fall, Domenici was sharply critical of provisions in the new law that authorized an expansion of polygraph testing within the DOE's nuclear weapons labs. The law added new requirements that will entail polygraphs for an estimated 5,000 or more additional persons working in the nuclear complex.

This year, Domenici has sought commitments from new Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham and General John Gordon, administrator of the National Nuclear Security Administration, for a renewed commitment to revisit the issue of widespread polygraph examinations of lab workers.