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Wednesday, May 18, 2005

Los Alamos County Councilor Heads to Iraq

By **Allison Majure**
For the Journal

Los Alamos County Councilor Mike Wismer has shipped out to Baghdad.

Wismer, who left for Iraq earlier this month, will help create human-resources policies and procedures for Iraq's nascent government.

Wismer works as a group leader for security services for Los Alamos National Laboratory and teaches three classes in sociology— on such topics as crime and delinquency— at the University of New Mexico-Los Alamos. He's also worked as chief of staff for the Protection Technologies of Los Alamos security firm.

Wismer said the opportunity to make a difference and contribute to the historic work of helping establish democratic processes in Iraq is too important to pass up.

"In your lifetime, certain things converge on you, and the opportunities arise and you need to take those opportunities when you can," he said before leaving the country. "I'm not going to ruin my lab job, my teaching, my relationships. ... Working with Middle East contingents and international entities will be beneficial. I can only learn."

John Killeen, Wismer's boss at LANL, said, "We'll have to try to get along as best we can

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without him.

"This (Iraq mission) is a critical national priority that he is well suited to step up to. If you weigh the two— his job here and helping to set up the Iraqi government— it's pretty clear what the priority is."

In Baghdad, Wismer will be working for two months with another Los Alamos resident, Julia DeMichelis.

DeMichelis runs the Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening for the State University of New York's Center for International Development.

The center holds a contract for work in Iraq through the U.S. Agency for International Development.

According to an e-mail from DeMichelis, the Iraqi Transitional National Authority is supported by 100 employees in various departments, and "no one has a job description."

Wismer will be working with Iraqi leaders to develop personnel policies, including recruitment guidelines, staff training and professional development for positions supportive of the Iraqi national legislature. These include jobs for attorneys, analysts, software engineers, transportation directors, interpreters, cafeteria workers, facilities, procurement and finance professionals, librarians, researchers and statisticians.

Wismer got involved through DeMichelis, who "sent out a note concerning this position in early April," he said.

Wismer applied for and was selected on a fast track for the two-month job. He will take an unpaid leave of absence from his job at LANL.

Wismer served in the first Iraq war as chief of security at Riyadh Air Base in Saudi Arabia in 1991.

"I was there (in the Middle East) 14 years ago to bring war with a single-minded, single focus," he said. "How nice now to bring peace and be a part of that effort."

After Wismer announced his plans to go to Iraq, the Los Alamos County Council passed a motion waiving for Wismer a rule barring councilors from missing three consecutive meetings.

Councilor Jim Hall, in making the motion, said the council

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should recognize Wismer's work "in our national interest and support him in any way that we can."

Disclosure: Freelance writer Allison Majure was appointed to Los Alamos County's Planning and Zoning Commission by the Los Alamos County Council, and Wismer was among the councilors who voted for her appointment.



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