

Public Testimony for the Record FY 2021

House Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development and Related Agencies Instructions for FY 2021 Public Witness Hearing

March 31, 2020

The organizations and experts below endorse the following statement on programmatic issues under the jurisdiction of the Subcommittee:

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To enhance its security, the United States should take steps to reduce its reliance on nuclear weapons. It needs a plan that relies on fewer, not newer and more, nuclear weapons, and one that will be affordable and executable. Such a plan should also limit the growing nuclear competition with Russia and China, consistent with U.S. obligations under the Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).

Instead, the Trump administration's Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 budget request for nuclear weapons is an unexpected and unnecessary increase that makes our country less safe. The budget request for the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) calls for \$15.6 billion for Weapons Activities, an increase of \$3.1 billion, or 25 percent, above the fiscal year 2020 appropriation and \$2.8 billion above the projection for FY2021 in the Fiscal Year 2020 budget request.

Such a large increase in nuclear weapons funding takes money away from other, more pressing needs, and invests instead in unneeded programs that do not increase our security, but instead make us less safe.

Even more disturbing, this unexpected increase is not an anomaly, but a trend. In FY 2019, the NNSA budget request for FY2020 Weapons Activities was projected to be \$11.9 billion, but it was \$12.4 billion. In FY 2017, the NNSA budget for FY 2018 Weapons Activities was projected to be \$9.6 billion, but instead it was \$10.2 billion. The only certainty in NNSA budget requests is they will be more for Weapons Activities than they were projected to be in the previous year.

Moreover, despite these increases in budget, Congress can have little confidence that the NNSA will be able to produce any major project on time and on budget. For example, in 2011, the NNSA projected the B61-12 gravity bomb would cost \$4 billion and production would start in 2017 and be completed in 2021. In 2013, the estimate increased to \$8 billion with first production in 2019 and completion in 2023. Last year the NNSA announced a delay due to a faulty component that will add an estimated \$600-700 million to the cost of the B61-12 and delay the first production until 2022. The W88 warhead alteration will also be delayed by roughly two years, at a cost of \$150-200 million, due to the same component problem.

The history of the Savannah River Site's mixed oxide (MOX) fuel fabrication plant is even more concerning. In 2002, the life cycle estimate of the project was \$5 billion. When the project was cancelled—after spending some \$5 billion on construction—that estimate had skyrocketed to \$48 billion.

There are many more examples of significant cost and timeline overruns in the NNSA's history. Yet now the NNSA, in part due to its own overreach and in part due to unattainable demands from the Department of Defense, is on a path toward wider failure.

For example, the NNSA is seeking to build 80 plutonium pits per year by 2030. The current plan is that 30 or more of those pits would be produced at Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) and 50 or more at the abandoned MOX site in South Carolina. To achieve that goal, on March 6, 2020, NNSA Administrator Lisa Gordon-Hagerty testified before the committee that the NNSA was “asking our sites and partners to do in 10 years what has traditionally taken 15 to 20 years.”

That is simply not how NNSA projects perform. They do not take one-half to two-thirds of the expected time. History shows they take significantly longer than expected and cost roughly double initial cost estimates. As the Institute for Defense Analyses [independent report on pit production noted](#), the NNSA has never completed a major project costing more than \$700 million in fewer than 16 years.

Congress needs to support a different, more sensible path forward. A sustainable, executable and affordable NNSA plan would involve the following decisions:

1. Eliminate the requirement to produce 80 pits per year. Instead, focus on initially establishing a smaller, reliable, well-executed production capability at LANL. After creating a small production capacity there in 2007, the NNSA was forced to shut it down in 2013 after a series of safety problems. Demonstrating the ability to produce 20 pits per year consistently is an appropriate near-term goal.
2. Cancel the W87-1 warhead replacement program, remove the W78 warheads from deployment on Minuteman III missiles and put the W78 warheads in storage, along with the bus, under enhanced surveillance. Instead deploy existing W87 warheads on all Minuteman missiles. This will quickly and affordably enhance safety in the U.S. ICBM fleet because, unlike the W78s, W87s use insensitive high explosives and other advanced safety features.
3. Postpone for at least two years the W93, a new Navy nuclear warhead that was inexplicably advanced by two years in the FY2021 budget request. The W76-1 warhead, which recently completed its production cycle, and the W88 warhead, which is in the middle of a major alteration that will replace its conventional high explosives, will be reliable for decades.
4. As a part of a decision to eliminate the planned but unnecessary Long Range Stand Off (LRSO) Weapon nuclear-armed cruise missile, cancel the W80-4 warhead and retire the W80 warhead along with the AGM-86B Air-Launched Cruise Missile (ALCM) that carries it.

5. Undertake a significant surveillance and science program to study the expected lifetimes of the plutonium pits in U.S. nuclear weapons, as recommended by JASON, the independent scientific advisory body.

In rough terms, pursuing the plan outlined above would save at least \$40 billion over the next ten years. With some of the money, the NNSA could increase funding for nonproliferation programs, environmental cleanup at DOE nuclear sites (which the administration is proposing to slash in the FY 20201 request) and for dismantling excess nuclear warheads.

Pursuing the above plan will significantly reduce the stress on the NNSA's infrastructure, enhancing the agency's ability it to obtain its goals on-time and on-budget. It will also enhance U.S. security and comply with our country's international obligations.