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**New Mexico:
Number One in Nuclear Weapons and Radioactive Wastes
Near Last in Citizen and Child Well-Being**

Santa Fe, NM – According to budget documents just released by the Department of Energy, DOE facilities in New Mexico will receive \$9.4 billion in FY 2023, substantially larger than the state’s entire operating budget of \$8.5 billion. Seventy-one percent (\$6.7 billion) will be for core nuclear weapons research and production programs under the DOE’s semi-autonomous nuclear weapons agency, the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA). That is 40.5% of the NNSA’s total nation-wide nuclear weapons budget of \$16.5 billion. It is also double that of the next closest state, since the Land of Enchantment has two of the nation’s three nuclear weapons laboratories (the Los Alamos and Sandia National Laboratories). Both of these Labs are within the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Santa Fe, whose Archbishop John Wester has echoed Pope Francis’ call for the abolition of nuclear weapons.

In contrast, the goal of NNSA programs in New Mexico is to indefinitely extend the service lives of existing nuclear weapons while giving them new military capabilities. This will be followed by completely new nuclear weapons that cannot be tested given the global testing moratorium. Alternatively, it could prompt the U.S. back into nuclear weapons testing, which would have serious international proliferation implications. NNSA’s claimed rationale is “deterrence” which requires only a few hundred nuclear weapons. In reality the U.S. and Russia each have thousands of ready-to-launch weapons for nuclear war-fighting that would result in global catastrophe, no longer so hypothetical since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

In addition, New Mexico has the largest repository of nuclear warheads in the U.S., if not the world. Numbers are classified, but there are up to an estimated 2,500 nuclear weapons held in an active reserve at the Kirtland Underground Munitions Storage Facility. This is less than two miles south of the Albuquerque International Airport, which shares runways with the Kirtland Air Force Base that sites the U.S. Air Force’s national Nuclear Weapons Center.

Of DOE’s remaining \$2.7 billion in non-nuclear weapons spending in New Mexico, \$456 million will be for the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP), the country’s only deep underground dump for radioactive bomb-making wastes. Even though WIPP is located in southern New Mexico, DOE prioritizes the disposal of radioactive wastes from Idaho and South Carolina above the Land of Enchantment because of strict legal agreements those states forced DOE to sign. In addition, DOE is pursuing plans to dispose of an additional 34 metric tons of “excess” radioactive plutonium from across the nation at WIPP. That excess plutonium will first have to be shipped to the Los Alamos Lab for pre-processing, then shipped to the Savannah River Site in South Carolina for treatment, then shipped yet again across New Mexico to WIPP.

As it currently stands, the New Mexico Environment Department has only permitted WIPP through 2024, which DOE is seeking to indefinitely extend. The NNSA has declared that half of WIPP’s

future capacity will be reserved for radioactive wastes from future plutonium “pit” bomb core production for new nuclear weapons at the Los Alamos Lab and the Savannah River Site. Climate change is clearly becoming an increasing national security threat. New Mexico is blessed with abundant solar, wind and geothermal resources, which could help meet that threat while providing hundreds of well-paying jobs. Yet DOE funding for renewable energy research is only 1.2% of the nuclear weapons budget in New Mexico.

Separately, even though New Mexico has never had a commercial nuclear energy power plant of its own, the nuclear energy industry is seeking to dump up more than 100,000 tons of lethal high-level radioactive wastes in our state for so-called “Consolidated Interim Storage.” This is not likely to be “interim” when there hasn’t been a fix for permanent high-level waste disposal in 65 years of commercial radioactive waste generation.

The New Mexican congressional delegation has always historically served the interests of the nuclear weapons industry while promising jobs, jobs, jobs. Yet New Mexico always ranks near the bottom of all 50 states in key socioeconomic indicators. Does the nuclear weapons industry championed by our congressional representatives really benefit New Mexicans as a whole? The facts indicate no, except for the privileged nuclear weaponeers.

For example, during the 79 years that the nuclear weapons industry has been in the Land of Enchantment, Census Bureau data shows that New Mexico slipped in per capita income from 37th in 1959 to 49th in 2019. US News and World Report recently gave New Mexico a best-state-to-live-in ranking of third from the bottom (and dead last in education). According to the state Human Services Department, we have the highest percentage of seniors living in poverty and the second-highest rate of overall poverty, suicide and food insecurity among children. The Land of Enchantment was recently ranked as 49th among all states in overall child well-being. Not coincidentally, New Mexico’s population is 63% People of Color who disproportionately bear the negative impacts of poverty. In contrast, the County of Los Alamos, home of the Los Alamos Lab, is 87% non-Hispanic White and is the 4th wealthiest county in the USA.

Jay Coghlan, director of Nuclear Watch New Mexico, commented, “While New Mexico’s increasing role in nuclear weapons production helps to fuel a new arms race, it does little to advance the well-being of its citizens and children. We should demand more of our politicians and spiritual leaders. They should help guide the way to healthy and prosperous lives that don’t rely on the continuing refinement and production of weapons of mass destruction that threaten the entire world and rob resources from the poor and needy.”

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Sources:

Department of Energy’s FY 2023 “State Tables” and “Laboratory Tables” at <https://www.energy.gov/sites/default/files/2022-04/doe-fy-23-budget-state-table.pdf> and <https://www.energy.gov/sites/default/files/2022-04/doe-fy-23-budget-lab-table.pdf>

New Mexico Human Services Department’s 2021 Data Book <https://www.hsd.state.nm.us/2021-data-book/>

The Annie E. Casey Foundation’s 2021 *KIDS COUNT Data Book*, <https://www.aecf.org/resources/2021-kids-count-data-book>

This press release is available at <https://nukewatch.org/doe-nm-fy23-budget-pr-4-19-22/>