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Trump's 2020 Nuclear Weapons Budget Escalates New Arms Race

Santa Fe, NM – Today the Trump Administration released more budget details for the Department of Energy and its semi-autonomous National Nuclear Security Administration's nuclear weapons programs for fiscal year 2020. This same fiscal year will also mark the 75th anniversaries of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Global Nuclear Weapons Threats Are Rising

More than 25 years after the end of the Cold War, all eight established nuclear weapons powers are "modernizing" their stockpiles. Talks have broken down with North Korea, the new nuclear weapons power. Nuclear-armed India and Pakistan narrowly averted war last month. Russian President Vladimir Putin made new nuclear threats in response to Trump's announced withdrawal from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty. This could lead to hair-trigger missile emplacements in the heart of Europe and block extension of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty with Russia. If so, the world will be without any nuclear arms control at all for the first time since 1972.

Meanwhile, the U.S. criticizes non-weapons states for signing a nuclear weapons ban treaty, despite the fact there have long been treaties completely banning chemical and biological weapons of mass destruction that the U.S. seeks to enforce. The pending international NonProliferation Treaty (NPT) Preparatory Committee conference at the United Nations is widely expected to collapse in failure because of the nuclear weapons powers' failure to enter into serious negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament. The NPT's Article VI mandate for those negotiations has been in effect since 1970, when the Treaty was signed by 189 countries (more than any other treaty).

In sum, the world is facing the most serious nuclear threats since the first half of the 1980's. At that time President Ronald Reagan said, "a nuclear war cannot be won and must not be fought" and called for the complete elimination of nuclear weapons.

Thirty-five years later, Trump is accelerating the \$1.2 trillion nuclear weapons "modernization" program begun under Obama. This program includes the complete refurbishment of existing nuclear warheads and the production of new designs; rebuilding the nuclear weapons production complex; and new missiles, subs and heavy bombers. Modernization will enrich the usual defense contractors, while at the same time the Defense Department has never passed a financial audit and the Department of Energy has been on the Government Accountability Office's High Risk List for project mismanagement for 27 consecutive years.

Some Department of Energy FY 2020 Budget Highlights

- The total Department of Energy (DOE) FY 2020 request is \$31.7 billion, a 10.9% cut.
- Out of that \$31.7 billion, funding for the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) is increased by 8.3% to \$16.5 billion, over half of DOE's budget.

- “Total Weapons Activities,” NNSA’s core nuclear weapons research and production programs, is increased by 11.8% to \$12.4 billion.
- Cleanup at DOE’s nuclear weapons sites is cut by 9.8% to \$6.47 billion. According to a recent Government Accountability Office Report,¹ DOE now estimates that future nation-wide cleanup of Cold War legacy radioactive and toxic wastes will cost at least \$377 billion—\$109 billion more than last year’s estimate. In that sense, DOE’s cleanup programs are going backwards, while NNSA’s nuclear weapons research and production programs that made the mess are being expanded.
- The NNSA and cleanup budgets combined, all related to past and present nuclear weapons programs, are 72.5% of DOE’s total budget request. Thus, DOE should be better recognized as the Department of Nuclear Weapons rather than “Energy.”
- Speaking of “Energy,” Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy is cut by 85.6%.
- Non-nuclear weapons “Science” is cut by 15.8% to \$5.55 billion.
- Nonproliferation Programs are increased by 3.3% to \$1.99 billion but are still only 16% the size of NNSA’s nuclear weapons research and production programs.
- Out of NNSA’s \$12.4 billion for core nuclear weapons research and production programs, \$4.89 billion (39%) is spent in New Mexico alone. Funding for core nuclear weapons research and production programs at the Los Alamos and Sandia Labs are just under \$2 billion each, 71% and 55% of total institutional funding respectively.²
- Cleanup at the Los Alamos Lab is cut from \$220 million to \$195 million.
- DOE’s FY 2020 budget includes \$116 million for Yucca Mountain and “Interim Storage.” The latter is “to develop and implement a robust interim storage capability enabling near-term consolidation of [lethal highly radioactive] nuclear waste.” This is a direct threat to New Mexico since the private Holtec Corporation proposes “interim” storage of up to 80,000 tons of existing and 90,000 future tons of commercial spent fuel rods. This is the rest of the country dumping on the Land of Enchantment since New Mexico has never had a commercial nuclear energy power plant.

NNSA Nuclear Weapons Highlights

- Funding for nuclear warhead dismantlements is cut 15% to \$47.5 million, (point).3% of NNSA’s total nuclear weapons research and production budget, despite the fact that dismantlements save taxpayers’ money by permanently eliminating some fixed security costs. There are believed to be some 2,500 retired nuclear weapons awaiting dismantling, but the necessary facilities are too busy performing Life Extension Programs.
- NNSA requests \$2.1 billion in FY 2020 for “Life Extension Programs,” \$197 million above last year, for existing nuclear weapons that prolong their service lives by at least 30 years while giving them new military capabilities. These include:
 - The W76-2, a new low-yield warhead for sub-launched missiles that will lower the threshold of possible use. The targeted adversary will have no way of knowing whether a high or low yield nuclear weapon is about to hit them, which could prompt a full retaliatory strike. Funding is cut from \$65 million to \$10 million, indicating this program’s rapid completion.³
 - The W80-4, AKA Long-Range Stand-Off weapon, a refurbished nuclear warhead for a completely new cruise missile that together will cost at least \$30 billion. Funding for this Life Extension Program is increased 37% to \$899 million, after it was already nearly doubled last year. The Long-Range Stand-Off weapon is the perfect offensive or “bolt from the blue” nuclear weapon since cruise missiles can fly under radar after being launched from a heavy bomber positioned far from its target.

- The B61-12 bomb, at ~\$12 billion worth more than its weight in gold, to be forward deployed in Europe. This will be the world's first "smart" nuclear bomb. Funding remains flat at \$792.6 million as design is completed and production about to begin.

- The FY 2020 NNSA budget creates a new line item for the W87-1 Life Extension Program with requested funding of \$112 million. This program has a high end of \$15 billion, not including production of its plutonium pits, which could cost nearly as much. The W87-1 is a major (but unreported) reversal by NNSA from its now-canceled "Interoperable Warhead" to replace both the Air Force's W78 intercontinental ballistic missile warhead and the Navy's W88 sub-launched warhead. NNSA now proposes to replace only the Air Force's W78 with the W87-1.

But this remarkable for two reasons: 1) For years NNSA claimed to Congress that the Interoperable Warhead would be the vehicle for transforming the nuclear weapons stockpile and its supporting research and production complex; and 2) the IW was the claimed rationale for expanding plutonium pit production. This illustrates the NNSA's shifting rationales for spending tens of billions of taxpayer dollars on unneeded new-design nuclear weapons that could undermine stockpile confidence in the absence of full-scale testing, or worse could increase pressure to test with serious global proliferation consequences.

- NNSA requests \$3.2 billion, \$121 million above FY 2019, to upgrade existing nuclear weapons production facilities and build new ones expected to be operational throughout this century. These include:

- The Uranium Processing Facility (UPF) at the Y-12 Plant near Oak Ridge, TN. Funding is increased 6% to \$745 million from \$703 million last year. The UPF will produce future thermonuclear components that put the "H" in H-bomb. This project was halted after a half-billion design mistake for which no one was held responsible and a Defense Department estimate that the UPF would cost \$19 billion. After those debacles the NNSA radically changed the UPF's design without completing legally required supplemental environmental review. This is the subject of National Environmental Policy Act litigation by co-plaintiffs Nuclear Watch NM and the Oak Ridge Environmental and Peace Alliance.

NNSA's FY 2020 budget repeats the claim that the UPF will remain under its original estimate of \$6.5 billion. This is false because NNSA is deliberately omitting the costs of continuing operations at two dangerous old facilities previously slated for decontamination and decommissioning. NNSA now plans to indefinitely keep them open to perform some of the UPF's previously slated operations.⁴ Moreover, after a team of Lockheed Martin and Bechtel won the Y-12 management contract, it awarded UPF construction to Bechtel without competition. Bechtel is responsible for some of the biggest cost overruns in the DOE complex, for example the Waste Treatment Facility at Hanford (originally \$3.5 billion, now \$13.5 billion and may never work).

- "Plutonium Sustainment" is doubled from \$361 million to \$712 million, after it was already nearly doubled last year, and is projected to jump to \$1.29 billion in 2024. In NNSA's words, "The [FY 2020] increase for Plutonium Sustainment supports conceptual design and pre-Critical Decision (CD)-1 activities for repurposing the Mixed-Oxide Fuel (MOX) Fabrication Facility to produce 50 pits per year," for which NNSA is asking for \$410 million in just FY 2020 alone. This follows the NNSA May 2018 decision to quadruple plutonium pit production to 80 pits per year, with 30 or more at the Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL), and 50 or more by repurposing the boondoggle MOX Facility at the Savannah River Site (SRS) in South Carolina for pit production.

At LANL, this means the winding down of the controversial Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement Project, which has dragged on since 2004 and will have its funding terminated in FY 2022. However, elements of that project, including upgrades in support of expanded pit production at LANL's main plutonium facility (known as "PF-4"), are being transferred to a new congressionally-directed "Plutonium Pit Production Project." NNSA is requesting \$21.2 million in FY 2020 for conceptual design work, with larger requests to follow.

There is no clear need for expanded plutonium pit production, especially now that NNSA has terminated the Interoperable Warhead, the previous claimed rationale for expanded production. In an obscure December 2018 report NNSA says it wants to use new plutonium pits in the W87-1 Life Extension Program, but if some reason it can't it would use new pits in the next, unspecified Life Extension Programs. The central point is that NNSA has yet to give clear, concrete justification for the 10's of billions of taxpayer dollars that it put into expanded pit production. Furthermore, NNSA may produce heavily modified pits, which since they can't be full-scale tested may erode confidence in the nuclear weapons stockpile, or worse yet potentially drive the U.S. back into testing which would have severe international proliferation consequences.

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires federal agencies to subject their proposals to public review and comment. NNSA tried in four previous NEPA processes to sanction expanded plutonium pit production but failed each time. NNSA has yet to begin a NEPA process for this fifth time, which citizen groups have warned the agency it is legally obligated to do.⁵

Jay Coghlan, Nuclear Watch Director, commented, "This rapid arms race build-up is going to undermine our national security. We don't need thousands of nuclear weapons to deter North Korea. An escalating nuclear arms race with Russia is a giant step backwards to the middle 1980's. Further enriching the usual nuclear weapons contractors through grossly excessive nuclear weapons and delivery systems is the wrong priority when instead taxpayers' money should be making our schools safe, developing carbon and nuclear-free energies, and rebuilding our country. We need a true Department of Energy, not a Department of Nuclear Weapons."

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This press release is available at

<https://nukewatch.org/press-release-item/doe2020budget/>

DOE's FY 2020 detailed Congressional Budget Request is available at

<https://www.energy.gov/cfo/downloads/fy-2020-budget-justification>

After more information becomes available a compilation by Nuclear Watch of the DOE/NNSA FY 2020 Congressional Budget Request will be available at <https://nukewatch.org/compilations-item/doe2020budget/>

¹ Program-Wide Strategy and Better Reporting Needed to Address Growing Environmental Cleanup Liability, GAO, January 2019, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/700/696632.pdf>

² See NukeWatch NM graphs on Los Alamos and Sandia funding at www.nukewatch.org

³ It is believed that the low-yield W76-2 is created by simply making the secondary (the component that puts the "H" in H-bomb) a dummy, technically easy and relatively cheap to do on the tail end of the W76-1 Life Extension Program.

⁴ Moreover, the independent Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board has declared that these two old facilities (Buildings 9215 and Beta 2E) can never be brought up to modern seismic standards, while the United States Geological Services has raised projected seismic risks in eastern TN.

⁵ See Letter to NNSA *Requirement for preparation of a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for expanded plutonium pit production*, Nuclear Watch NM, Tri-Valley CAREs and SRS Watch, October 31, 2018, <https://nukewatch.org/newsite/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/NNSA-Pit-NEPA-ltr-10-30-18.pdf>