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## **New Mexico Members of Congress Vote for Exorbitant Nuclear Bomb While State Is Ranked as the Worst for Children**

**Santa Fe, NM** – Yesterday all three House members of the New Mexican congressional delegation voted against an amendment that would cut money added to a wasteful nuclear weapons program. In April the Obama Administration asked for \$537 million in fiscal year 2014 for a “Life Extension Program” for the B61 Cold War nuclear bomb, 45% above the 2013 level. The House Appropriations Committee added \$23.7 million to that bloated request, which the amendment would have cut. Overall, the B61 Life Extension Program has exploded in estimated costs to where each warhead will cost twice their weight in gold just to “refurbish” (which does not include original production and ongoing maintenance costs).

The sponsor of the amendment, Rep. Mike Quigley, D-Ill., testified during floor debate:

At a time when we are slashing funds for disease research at the NIH [National Institute of Health], failing to fund our crumbling infrastructure, and underinvesting in our children’s education, we are increasing funding to keep hundreds of nuclear bombs in operation that we will never use. The Cold War is over.

The Albuquerque Journal reported that Rep. Ben Ray Luján, D-N.M.,

...supported the full \$551 million for the B61 Life Extension Program because it is a national security priority. “This funding is important for Los Alamos and Sandia labs’ effort to ensure the safety of the nuclear weapons stockpile, and cuts to that funding impact the ability to keep it secure,” Luján said.

Rather just ensuring safety and security the program will radically improve the bomb, giving it new military capabilities by turning it into a precisely targeted smart bomb and mating it to future bombers for supersonic stealthy delivery. Currently the main mission of B61 bombs is as tactical nuclear weapons in NATO countries, a relic of the Cold War. Improved B61’s fly in the face of Obama’s newly declared goal of reducing the presence of battlefield nuclear weapons in Europe, even as he proposes to negotiate with the Russians for further arms reductions. Moreover, if security is really the issue, the sure solution that saves taxpayers money and encourages

nonproliferation is to withdraw the nuclear bombs from forward deployment in Europe, where a few years ago protesting peace activists were able to infiltrate within a few hundred yards of them.

Ironically, the B61 Life Extension Program may actually undermine our own national security by introducing major changes to existing bombs. Our stockpile has been extensively full-scale tested, and repeated studies have found our nuclear weapons to be even more reliable than previously believed. The Los Alamos and Sandia Labs propose to create a “frankenbomb” by mixing and matching four variants of the B61 bomb into a single new modification. Common sense dictates that the last thing we should do while seeking to maintain confidence in our reliable nuclear weapons stockpile is to introduce major changes that can’t be tested.

Our New Mexican congressional delegation represents a state that was just ranked as the worst of all fifty for the well-being of its children, where more than 25% live in poverty. In stark contrast, Los Alamos County, dominated by the lab, is the second richest county in the entire USA. Nuclear weapons programs are a poor producer of jobs, where for example according to the government’s own documents a new \$6 billion plutonium facility was not going to produce a single new permanent job at Los Alamos Lab.

Contrary to the claimed economic benefits of the Los Alamos and Sandia Labs, New Mexico as a whole continues to fall from 37<sup>th</sup> in per capita personal income in 1959 to 44<sup>th</sup> in 2011. Nevertheless, the Labs have always had inordinate influence over New Mexican politicians. One extreme example is the recent startling revelation that in between unsuccessful Senate campaigns former Rep. Heather Wilson was paid more than \$450,000 by the Los Alamos and Sandia Labs for “consulting” contracts that had no written work requirements.

The nuclear weapons labs have voracious appetites for federal funding, with their directors simultaneously acting as the presidents of the executive board of the for-profit limited liability corporations that run the labs (those private LLCs pay 2/3’s of the directors’ annual compensation of around one million dollars). Business will boom with never-ending Life Extension Programs, and Sandia and Los Alamos are not satisfied with just one Life Extension Program for the B61. They already plan yet another one 20 years from now that initial figures indicate would be even more expensive. In fact, the labs plan a never-ending cycle of Life Extension Programs that intentionally seek to implement major design changes for all existing types of nuclear weapons in our stockpile, costing at least \$60 billion (while the doubling of costs has so far been the rule).

Jay Coghlan, director of Nuclear Watch New Mexico, commented, “Congressman Ben Ray Luján should ask himself what good does a Cold War nuclear bomb that the for-profit labs want to endlessly tinker with do for New Mexican children. Pork for the labs should not drive nuclear weapons policies, especially when it’s of little if any tangible benefit to average New Mexicans. Luján should, instead, dedicate himself to

boosting funding for programs that would really help our children but are facing painful sequester cuts, such as education, medical care and food assistance. Those investments would really brighten their future, and help raise New Mexico from its shameful position as the worst state for kids.”

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See: *House rejects effort to trim \$23.7M in funding for B61*, Michael Coleman, Albuquerque Journal, July 11, 2013.

For New Mexico’s ranking as the worst state for kids see Kids Count Data Center <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/updates/show/20-2013-data-book-rankings>

For the scope and schedule of never-ending planned Life Extension Programs for existing nuclear weapons see NNSA’s FY 2014 Stockpile Stewardship and Management Plan <http://nukewatch.org/importantdocs/resources/SSMP-FY2014.pdf>

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