

Peace Farm

Nuclear Watch New Mexico

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Watchdog Groups Seek Info On Alleged Rat Shootings in Nuclear Weapons Facilities

Amarillo, TX – Today, the Peace Farm and Nuclear Watch New Mexico have filed a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request and sent a letter to Rep. Max Thornberry (R.-TX), chairman of the House Armed Services Committee. The two groups are seeking additional information concerning a startling remark he made in a June 23, 2015 speech entitled “A Strategy for America.” In that speech, he argued for “modernization” of the U.S. nuclear weapons stockpile and its supporting research and production complex. Along with new nuclear-armed missiles, subs and bombers, this modernization is expected to cost taxpayers a trillion dollars over the next 30 years. As an example of why it is needed, Thornberry said

We have lost people, engineers in the nuclear complex, who go work in the energy industry, partly because they had to, well, shoot rats off of their lunch in some of the facilities that they were working in.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NLdCpbe8IZ0>, beginning minute 45:49

On the same day the trade newspaper *Defense Daily* quoted Thornberry as saying

Nuclear engineers no longer consider national laboratories "desirable" places to work, "partly because they had to shoot rats off their lunch in some of the facilities that they were working in." (Quotation marks indicate the newspaper's direct quotes of Thornberry) <http://www.defensedaily.com/hasc-chair-increase-u-s-defense-spending-to-counter-russian-nuke-modernization/>

Rep. Max Thornberry represents the 13th congressional district in the Texas Panhandle. The National Nuclear Security Administration's (NNSA's) site for the final assembly and disassembly of nuclear weapons, the Pantex Plant, is located in that district, 17 miles northeast of Amarillo. A local watchdog and peace group, The Peace Farm, has long monitored nuclear weapons programs at Pantex.

The Peace Farm's Board President Cletus (Jerry) Stein, who lives in the 13th district, commented, “I am surprised to hear what my congressman House Armed Services Chairman Thornberry has reported. The Peace Farm wants to know who is doing the rat shooting and where this occurs. Does this possibly mean that employees are carrying personal firearms and weapons at some of the nation's most sensitive nuclear weapons facilities? Is this shooting taking place near explosives and nuclear materials? Is this occurring at Pantex? Mr. Thornberry's remarks raise a number of serious safety and security questions that we are keen to have answered.”

Nuclear weapons modernization begins with very expensive “Life Extension Programs” for each type of nuclear weapon in the planned stockpile, performed at Pantex and the Y-12 Plant near Oak Ridge, TN. Thornberry is on record stating that Life Extension Programs and not dismantlements are the priority at Pantex. An estimated 2,500 nuclear weapons are in the queue for disassembly, and dismantlements are proven to enhance security and permanently save taxpayers money. A December 2013 Government Accountability Office study found that the Navy saved \$190 million through accelerated dismantlements, which eliminated the need to build a new safe and secure storage facility.

To help foster better public understanding of the need (or not) for a trillion dollar taxpayer investment in nuclear weapons modernization, and some of the stated rationales in support of that investment, the Peace Farm and Nuclear Watch New Mexico have filed a Freedom of Information Act request with the National Nuclear Security Administration. Nuclear Watch has extensive FOIA experience, and has twice won FOIA litigation in federal court. In this instance, the two groups are asking for documentation of where and when these reported rat shootings occurred, whether authorized personnel did the shooting, and if explosives and nuclear materials were within bullet range.

The two groups have also requested more information directly from Rep. Max Thornberry, in his capacity as chairman of the House Armed Services Committee.

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The joint Peace Farm - Nuclear Watch New Mexico Freedom of Information Act request is available at

<http://www.nukewatch.org/importantdocs/resources/Peace-Farm-NWNM-FOIA-Request-RatShootings-Nuclear-Facilities.pdf>

Their joint letter to Rep. Max Thornberry, Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, is available at

<http://nukewatch.org/importantdocs/resources/Peace-Farm-NukeWatch-Thornberry-Letter.pdf>