



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE February 14, 2011

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Obama Increases Funding for Modified Nuclear Weapons & New Production Facilities

Santa Fe, NM - In his April 2009 Prague speech President Barack Obama called for a nuclear weapons-free world, for which in part he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Today he has released his Administration's FY 2012 Congressional Budget Request that follows up on the deal made to placate a Republican minority in the Senate for ratification of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) with Russia. In exchange, Obama pledged to increase funding for new U.S. nuclear weapons production facilities and massive improvements to the nuclear arsenal. These increases total \$85 billion over the next decade to "modernize" the nuclear weapons research and production complex, and \$100 billion for new heavy bombers, ballistic missiles and strategic submarines.

Republican Senate Whip Jon Kyl engineered Section 1251 of the FY 2010 National Defense Authorization Act, which required Obama to submit a modernization plan (AKA "1251 report") to the Senate at the same time he submitted New START for ratification. With the dual submittals last May Obama committed to increase funding for the National Nuclear Security Administration's (NNSA's) nuclear weapons programs. As the fight over START ratification heated up the Administration released a second 1251 report in November, which further increased projected funding for those programs to an average of \$8.6 billion per year for the next 10 years. This is in contrast to the previous 20-year average of \$6.2 billion and the historic Cold War average of \$5.1 billion. Obama's new FY 2012 budget request matches the figures he gave in the November 1251 report with \$7.6 billion requested in FY 2012 for NNSA nuclear weapons programs, rising to nearly \$8.6 billion by FY 2016 (which are 19% and 34% increases respectively above the FY 2010 level).

"Modernization" of the U.S. nuclear weapons complex means rebuilding its production capacity. Specifically, a new facility at the Los Alamos National Laboratory in direct support of plutonium pit production (the "Chemical and Metallurgy Research Building Replacement Project" (CMRR)) is now estimated to cost up to \$6.16 billion, but nevertheless final costs are still "TBD" (to be determined). The FY 2012 CMRR request is \$300 million, up 33% from \$225 million this fiscal year and more than triple the FY 2010 appropriation of \$97 million. This is despite the fact that design costs for the CMRR's huge "Nuclear Facility" are still not known for FY 2012.

Funding for a new “Uranium Processing Facility” (UPF) for production of thermonuclear secondaries at the Y-12 production plant near Oak Park Ridge, TN, is proposed to increase to \$160.2 million from \$115 million in FY 2011 (+39%). However, its big money is in the following three consecutive years, climbing to \$350 million by 2014 (triple FY 2011 funding). In all the UPF is now estimated to cost up to \$6.5 billion, but it too has final costs listed as “TBD.”

Outside of the federal budget, ground was broken last September on a new privately-financed ~\$700 million Kansas City Plant for nonnuclear components production for U.S. nuclear weapons, subsidized by Kansas City municipal bonds. This pretty well spans the spectrum of future US nuclear weapons production, with huge new facilities for plutonium, uranium and nonnuclear components. At the same time, the Obama budget continues to cut dismantlements from \$96.1 million in FY 2010 to \$56.77 million in FY 2012 (down 40%).

Obama’s FY 2012 budget also increases funding for a Life Extension Program (LEP) for the sub-launched W76 warhead to \$257 million. It creates a new LEP for the B61 funded at \$223.6 million, even though that gravity bomb’s mission of forward deployment in Europe against a Soviet threat has long since vanished. Under “Stockpile Systems” a LEP feasibility study is funded at \$51.08 million (almost double FY 2001) for the W78 ICBM warhead.

Nuclear Watch New Mexico opposes Life Extension Programs because extending the service lives of hundreds or thousands of existing nuclear weapons is not consistent with our declared national security goal of a future nuclear weapons-free world. Further, LEPs can endow existing nuclear weapons with new military capabilities, despite repeated denials at the highest levels of U.S. government. For example, the W76 warhead is being retrofitted with a new fuze believed to be capable of selectable heights of burst. In combination with increased target accuracy this can transform the 100-kiloton W76 from a weapon of deterrence into a potential hard target killer.

Finally, LEPs are and will be increasingly introducing more profound changes to existing weapons. The B61 and W78 may undergo intrusive modifications to the all-important nuclear explosives package, which could seriously erode confidence in stockpile reliability, in the extreme even leading to resumed full-scale testing. Unfortunately, NNSA’s FY 2011 budget request refers to a possible “future stockpile that may encompass substantial new safety and surety features.” We suspect that the issues of safety and surety (preventing unauthorized use) are being cynically used to justify serious modifications to existing nuclear weapons that can provide new military capabilities.

We agree that a progressively shrinking nuclear weapons stockpile still needs to be rigorously maintained, even as we work toward a nuclear weapons-free world. But at the same time, Nuclear Watch argues that the right approach to maintaining stockpile safety and reliability is through “curatorship” of the arsenal through already well-understood methods of surveillance and replacement of limited life components as needed. These

methods are the most technically sound and fiscally prudent. They also align with a nonproliferation policy that must be consistent in not encouraging by example other nuclear powers to “modernize” their nuclear weapons or non-weapons powers to acquire them.

Repeated studies by independent nuclear weapons experts have shown that our stockpile is far more reliable than previously thought. Jay Coghlan, Nuclear Watch Director, commented, “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it! We do not need to sacrifice fiscal prudence and sound national security policy in order to condone expensive make work for the already privileged nuclear weapons labs. Obama’s new budget encourages those institutions to further entrench themselves in the receding nuclear weapons industry. Instead they should be redirected toward meeting today’s national security threats, such as preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons and promoting sustainable, clean (which rules out nuclear) and carbon-free energy independence.”

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NukeWatch’s detailed tabulation of the NNSA’s FY 2012 Budget Request will be available soon at

http://www.nukewatch.org/facts/nwd/NWNM_Tab_FY2012_BudgetRequest.pdf

For historic levels of funding for DOE/NNSA nuclear weapons programs since 1989 and Obama Administration funding projections out to FY 2018, please see

http://www.nukewatch.org/facts/nwd/Weapons_Chart_All_Dec_2010.pdf

(available now, but also included in the above tabulation)