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Domenici, Kyl and Sessions Call on Bush to Veto Appropriations If Congress Rejects Funding for New-Design Nuclear Weapons

Santa Fe, NM—Senators Pete Domenici (R.-NM), Jon Kyl (R.-AZ) and Jeff Sessions (R.-AL) have urged President Bush to threaten a presidential veto if Congressional appropriations committees reject funding for proposed new-design nuclear weapons, the so-called Reliable Replacement Warhead (RRW). In January Congress rejected any funding for RRW for fiscal year 2008. The House appropriations committee is expected to reject any RRW funding for FY 2009 in a scheduled vote tomorrow.

Domenici, Kyl and Sessions state that “(t)his Administration must complete the Phase 2a [design] studies of the Reliable Replacement Warhead (RRW).” While correctly pointing out that the Administration had asked for only \$10 million directly for RRW design, they ignore the fact that the Administration had also asked for up to an additional \$83.6 million in RRW-related work in other programs. Nevertheless, the three senators ask for an immediate increase of \$56 million for RRW design work in fiscal year 2009. Moreover, they go on to argue that “(f)or FY10, the Administration should seek full funding for the RRW 2b engineering studies” that would lead to full production. Never mind that a new president will assume office in January 2009, and Congress has already required him to review and likely change President Bush’s current nuclear weapons policies.

In a questionable leap of logic, Domenici, Kyl and Sessions use recent serious lapses by the Department of Defense in nuclear weapons security as a pretext to argue for an emergency supplemental funding package to revitalize the Department of Energy’s nuclear weapons complex. They argue that the current Administration must “act in the coming months to lock in a nuclear weapons complex transformation initiative” that will expand plutonium pit production to 50 to 80 per year (pits are the crucial nuclear weapons “triggers”). Toward that end, they call for a funding increase of at least \$25 million in FY 2009 for the existing production facility at the Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL). They also call for doubling funding to \$200 million for an advanced plutonium lab called the “Chemical and Metallurgical Research Replacement Project” that will directly support pit production. Finally, they urge the current Administration to increase funding to enhance the capability to conduct full-scale nuclear weapons tests at the Nevada Test Site.

Without explanation, Domenici, Kyl and Sessions assert that their budget recommendations “represent the considered judgment and expertise of the national labs, former military leaders, and, in many cases, the Administration’s own budget justifications.”

About to retire, Senator Pete Domenici has long been known for his ability to lavish nuclear weapons funding on the Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL). Future missions at the Lab are expected to be serious campaign issues in the senate race to succeed him. Jay Coghlan, Nuclear Watch Executive Director, commented, “Sadly, Domenici is leaving behind a misguided legacy of fixing Los Alamos’s future on inevitably shrinking nuclear weapons programs. If he truly cared more about average northern New Mexicans than he cares about nuclear weapons programs, he would have prioritized nonproliferation, cleanup, climate change and energy independence programs. Instead of leftover Cold War thinking we need mission diversification at LANL to address new national security concerns and better ensure future jobs.”

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The June 19, 2008 letter by Senators Domenic, Kyl and Sessions to President Bush is available at:
http://www.nukewatch.org/importantdocs/resources/kyl-domenici-sessions_letter061908.pdf

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