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Nuclear Weapons “Modernization” Will Cost One Trillion Dollars Over Thirty Years; Locally, Los Alamos Lab Cleanup and Job Creation Are Imperiled

The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO) has just released its study *Projected Costs of Nuclear Forces 2014 -2023*. Its stunning conclusion is that estimated costs for maintenance and “modernization” of the nuclear weapons stockpile, delivery systems, and research and production complex will total \$355 billion over the next decade. This is 70% higher than the figure the Obama Administration reported to Congress in May 2012.

As if this were not bad enough, the CBO also reports that costs after 2023 will increase yet more rapidly since “modernization” is only now beginning. The report does not attempt to project costs for maintenance and modernization of nuclear forces over the planned period of the next thirty years, but given current trends it will easily exceed one trillion dollars.

Approximately two-thirds of the modernization costs will be for new submarines, bombers and missiles that could be operational for the rest of this century, contrary to the Obama Administration’s rhetoric of a future world free of nuclear weapons. The remaining third will be for the Department of Energy’s research and production complex, which includes the Los Alamos, Lawrence Livermore and Sandia nuclear weapons labs.

While the American public at large is experiencing growing income inequality and limited economic opportunity, nuclear weapons contractors are experiencing increasing profits and decreasing federal oversight. The for-profit corporations running the labs, comprised of Lockheed Martin (the world’s biggest defense contractor), Bechtel, and the University of California, plan a never-ending cycle of exorbitantly expensive “Life Extension Programs.” These programs will not only extend the service lives of existing nuclear weapons for decades, but also give them new military capabilities, contrary to declared U.S. international policy. Ironically, the contractors’ drive for profits may undermine national security, as confidence in our nuclear weapons could be eroded by planned massive changes to an extensively tested stockpile that has been proven to be reliable.

The Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) had planned to “modernize” with a new facility to support expanded production of plutonium pit cores (or “primaries”) for nuclear weapons. Because of budget constraints, the Obama Administration decided to defer it in favor of the Uranium Processing Facility near Oak Ridge, TN, for production of nuclear weapons “secondaries.” The LANL plutonium project, known as the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement (CMRR)-Nuclear Facility, had grown from an original

estimate of \$600 million to around \$6 billion, which would not have created a single new permanent job (it would have merely relocating existing Lab jobs). But the Uranium Processing Facility has now grown from a similarly estimated \$600 million to an astounding worse case \$19 billion, in part due to a simple design error that cost a half-billion dollars just to correct on paper.

So-called nuclear weapons modernization at these costs is clearly not sustainable, especially when they create few if any new permanent jobs. Moreover, they exist for a product that must never be used (i.e. nuclear weapons). Therefore, they are of little economic benefit to society outside of the privileged enclaves that benefit from nuclear weapons research and production (for example, Los Alamos County is the second richest county out of 3,077 counties in the USA).

Funding for nuclear weapons modernization programs will rob taxpayers' dollars for programs that local citizens really need. For example, the Los Alamos Lab plans to "cap and cover" its largest waste dump (called "Area G"), leaving up to one million cubic meters of poorly characterized radioactive and toxic wastes and backfill permanently buried in unlined pits and shafts. This will create a *de facto* permanent nuclear waste dump above the Rio Grande, and most importantly above a sole source groundwater aquifer that supplies 270,000 people in the arid Southwest.

The Cities of Santa Fe and Taos, New Mexico, oppose LANL's plans to create a permanent nuclear waste dump, passing resolutions demanding full characterization of the wastes and offsite disposal. The resolutions note that, "full cleanup of Area G would be a win-win for New Mexicans, permanently protecting our precious groundwater and the Rio Grande while creating 100's of high paying jobs for twenty years or more." The costs for full cleanup of Area G would be about the same as four to five years' worth of the Lab's nuclear weapons programs that caused the mess to begin with.

Jay Coghlan, Nuclear Watch NM Director, commented, "We simply can't afford to squander precious taxpayers' money on programs that enrich contractors while introducing radical changes to fully tested nuclear weapons. This may harm national security by undermining confidence in stockpile reliability. Instead, New Mexicans should demand that their elected officials invest taxpayers' money in programs that create real security for citizens, such as creating jobs that protect diminishing water resources, rather than their habitual support for unneeded, mismanaged and exorbitantly expensive nuclear weapons programs."

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The Congressional Budget Office report *Projected Costs of Nuclear Forces 2014 -2023* is available at <http://www.cbo.gov/sites/default/files/cbofiles/attachments/12-19-2013-NuclearForces.pdf>

The Santa Fe City press release announcing passage of its resolution opposing "cap and cover" of Los Alamos Lab's largest radioactive and toxic waste dump is available at http://www.santafenm.gov/news/detail/santa_fe_city_council_unanimously_passed_resolution

For a comparative estimate of cleaning up LANL's Area G radioactive and toxic waste dump see

http://www.nukewatch.org/facts/nwd/Area_G_Comparison_Costs-11-14-12.pdf

For a history of successful citizen activism against expanded plutonium pit production see
<http://nukewatch.org/facts/nwd/Pit-Production-History.pdf>