



A national network of organizations working to address issues of nuclear weapons production and waste cleanup

MEDIA ADVISORY: WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY'S FY 2024 NUCLEAR WEAPONS AND CLEANUP BUDGET REQUEST

March 8, 2023

For use with DOE's scheduled budget release on Thursday March 9, 2023

For more information, key contacts are listed below.

The Biden Administration is releasing its Fiscal Year 2024 federal budget on Thursday, March 9. It is expected to be a “skinny budget” with just topline financial numbers. If the pattern of the last few years for the Department of Energy’s (DOE’s) budget is continued, there can be three more releases over the next six weeks that grow progressively more detailed (there is initially little if any site-specific budget information). Historically around 60% of DOE’s funding has been earmarked for nuclear weapons production and cleanup of Cold War wastes and contamination.

The release of the presidential budget begins the annual legislative process for funding DOE programs and sites. The two bicameral congressional subcommittees that have jurisdiction over the DOE budget are the Armed Services Committee Strategic Forces Subcommittee which “authorizes” funding, and the Energy and Water Development Appropriations Subcommittee which actually provides funding. Congress has managed to pass the Defense Authorization Act for more than 50 consecutive years, but is increasingly unable to pass appropriations bills, leading to short-term Continuing Resolutions (CRs). Given bipartisan friction and the beginning of election campaigning, Continuing Resolutions are likely for this coming federal fiscal year 2024, which begins October 1, 2023.

The Alliance for Nuclear Accountability strongly opposed the massive 25% FY 2021 increase that the Trump Administration gave to the nuclear weapons programs of DOE’s semi-autonomous National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA). The Biden Administration not only kept Trump’s increases in subsequent budgets but substantially added to them, particularly for expanded production of plutonium “pit” bomb cores for nuclear weapons. Meanwhile, dismantlements of nuclear warheads have slowed to a crawl and funding for cleanup of Cold War radioactive and hazardous wastes has remained flat.

DOE’s nuclear weapons and environmental management programs have been on the Government Accountability Office’s “High Risk List” for project mismanagement and waste of taxpayers’ dollars for more than 30 consecutive years. Defense Department and DOE costs for so-called “modernization” of U.S. nuclear forces begun under Obama is expected to be around \$2 trillion over the next 30 years.

The Alliance for Nuclear Accountability, a 36-year-old network of groups from communities downwind and downstream of U.S. nuclear weapons sites, will be analyzing the following critical issues. For more details, please contact the ANA leaders listed at the end of this advisory.

General Budget Issues

- Will the Biden Administration propose the biggest military budget since the end of the Cold War?

- Will partisan fighting over the federal debt ceiling block the congressional appropriations process, possibly leading to government shutdown? What possible impact could this have on NNSA nuclear weapons and DOE cleanup programs?
- NNSA's FY 2023 \$16.5 billion budget request for "Total Weapons Activities" anticipated an 8% jump to \$17.8 billion in FY 2024. Given typical cost overruns and delays, could NNSA's request for Total Weapons Activities top \$18 billion?
- The U.S.' existing nuclear weapons stockpile has been extensively tested and proven to be reliable. There are already enough nuclear weapons to destroy civilization many times over. When will emerging national security concerns such as disruptive climate change and preventing the next global pandemic be prioritized above more unneeded nuclear weapons?

Nuclear Warheads

- The W87-1 will be the first new nuclear warhead with wholly new components. It is slated to top the Air Force's new Sentinel intercontinental ballistic missiles and is the driver for NNSA's expanded plutonium pit production. Media has reported that NNSA has changed the design of the W87-1 pit which will lead to a one-year delay at the Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) for the "First Production Unit." Will NNSA's FY 2024 budget request acknowledge that design change and delay? Will the budget justification include all of the implications of this change?
- Since new pits cannot be full-scale tested because of the testing moratorium, will NNSA's FY 2024 budget request acknowledge potential reliability issues? Related, will it acknowledge potential pressures to resume full-scale testing, which would have severe international proliferation consequences?
- The W93 is a proposed new submarine-launched warhead whose main lobbyist is the United Kingdom, which substantially relies upon U.S. warhead designs and is increasing its own nuclear weapons stockpile. Biden's FY 2023 budget funded the W93 program at \$240 million, a near five-fold jump from the previous year. Will there be another massive funding increase for the W93? Does the Navy really want this new-design warhead when its own existing warheads have already been tested and upgraded? Will the U.S. Congress question the need for a provocative and very expensive new-design nuclear weapon whose main purpose seems for a different country?
- Trump's 2018 Nuclear Posture Review proposed to bring back nuclear-armed sea-launched cruise missiles (SLCMs), which were retired by President George H.W. Bush after the end of the Cold War. Biden's 2022 Nuclear Posture Review canceled the SLCM, to which there has been congressional opposition that may grow stronger with Republican control of the House. Will Biden's FY 2024 budget continue to reject the SLCM? Does the U.S. Navy really want the additional expense of having to certify conventionally-armed attack submarines for nuclear-armed SLCMs?
- The B83, the last U.S. megaton-class nuclear bomb, had been slated for retirement before Trump's 2018 Nuclear Posture Review reversed its course. Will the Biden FY 2024 budget request include funding to keep it in the stockpile – or will FY 2024 instead fund its promised retirement?
- Will nuclear warhead dismantlements continue to be funded at a paltry ~\$50 million per year, a small fraction of one percent of NNSA's Total Weapons Activities? Warhead dismantlements provide a good international nonproliferation example and save taxpayers' money by eliminating long-term security costs. Will dismantlements be given priority in the coming fiscal year?

Nuclear Weapons Production

- A recent report by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) concluded that NNSA has no credible cost estimates for its expanded plutonium pit production program, which is the agency's most expensive program ever. An earlier GAO report formally recommended that NNSA institute an "Integrated Master Schedule" to better plan and coordinate planned redundant pit production between the Los Alamos National Laboratory and the Savannah River Site (SRS). Will NNSA's FY 2024 budget request implement GAO recommendations for credible cost estimates and an Integrated Master Schedule?
- NNSA's cost estimate to "repurpose" the failed MOX Fuel Fabrication Facility at SRS (which has already cost taxpayers ~\$7 billion) to pit production has more than doubled to above \$11 billion, with initial production delayed to 2036. Senior Pentagon officials have said that no amount of money can help NNSA meet originally targeted production in 2030. Nevertheless, Congress increased funding for pit production at SRS by \$500 million to \$1.2 billion in FY 2023. Will that same amount or more be requested in NNSA's FY 2024 budget as the new baseline for SRS pit production?
- Why is expanded plutonium pit production needed when the U.S. already has more than 15,000 pits in storage and independent experts have found that pits remain reliable for at least a century?

Cleanup

- Will the budget request comply with the law (National Defense Authorization Act of FY 2020, Sec. 4409) and include for Fiscal Years 2025-2028 annual estimates of the costs of meeting legal cleanup milestones at each DOE site? Will the budget request comply with the law (National Defense Authorization Act of FY 2021, Sec. 4410) for a Public Statement of Environmental Liabilities? DOE has never provided such public cost estimates, which would demonstrate that the budget request is many tens of billions of dollars short of what is required by legal agreements with host states.
- What will be the lifecycle cost estimate to clean up its nuclear sites? Chronic underfunding of DOE environmental programs leads to ever-increasing estimated lifecycle cleanup costs — from \$341.6 billion in FY 2016 to \$413.9 billion in FY 2019, to \$887.2 billion in FY 2023.
- How much is requested for the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP), which has a \$456.6 million appropriation in FY 2023 and was supposed to stop receiving waste in 2024? Will DOE state that it is beginning the process of siting another repository for the future radioactive wastes that it will generate from expanded nuclear weapons production?
- Will Biden's FY 2024 budget request include the necessary resources for the next critical phase of cleanup at the Hanford Site? It should be at least \$3.75 billion for at least the next five fiscal years. Doing otherwise will only add to long-term costs while increasing the risk to human health and the environment. Moreover, there is important cleanup work taking place at other DOE sites, and all of these efforts should be fully funded. Therefore, the Administration and Congress should support a significantly increased budget for the entire nation-wide cleanup program.

More Waste Generation

- How much funding is requested in DOE's Nuclear Energy budget for "consent-based siting" for a federal "interim" storage facility for commercial high-level radioactive wastes? The FY 2023 Appropriation included the requested \$10 million in the Integrated Waste Management System.

- Does DOE'S Nuclear Energy budget request again include funding for the Versatile Test Reactor, even though Congress has refused to fund the unneeded project in FY 2022 and FY 2023?

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The annual DOE and NNSA Congressional Budget Requests are typically available on the scheduled release date by 1:00 pm EST at <https://www.energy.gov/cfo/listings/budget-justification-supporting-documents>

For information about specific DOE and NNSA nuclear weapons sites and programs, contact:

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This media advisory is available at <https://ananuclear.org/what-to-look-for-in-fy24-budget/>