



Savannah River Site Watch

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Columbia, South Carolina

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Move by DOD and Nuclear Weapons Boosters to Take Over DOE Nuclear Weapons Budget Authority and Gut DOE's Environmental Management Budget must be Rejected; Boosters Pushing for Two Unjustified Plants to Fabricate Plutonium "Pits" for New and Old Nuclear Weapons Must Stand Down

Columbia, SC – Advocates for increased nuclear weapons spending via control of the U.S. Department of Energy's nuclear weapons budget are facing push-back from politicians and public interest organizations, including from Savannah River Site Watch.

Provisions in the U.S. Senate's version of the defense authorization act – National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021 (NDAA) – essentially remove the authority of DOE's National Nuclear Security Administration to allocate its budget on nuclear weapons projects. In the provisions in the Senate report on the NDAA, the Nuclear Weapons Council would take over the NNSA budget-allocation process, which would have the knock-on effect of negatively impact spending on such key DOE programs as environmental clean-up, including at the Savannah River Site.

The disturbing provisions were revealed in the Senate's "report" on the NDAA, approved by the Senate Armed Services Committee and sent to the full Senate. (See link in "notes" below.)

"We call on the full Senate to reject this blatant effort to take over the NNSA budget authority, which could undermine U.S. security by increasing funding for questionable nuclear weapons programs and reducing funding for essential clean-up programs," said Tom Clements, director of the public interest organization Savannah River Site Watch. "This front-door attempt to neutralize the NNSA and reduce the environmental management budget must be rejected by the full Senate," added Clements.

While the move by the Department of Defense and the Nuclear Weapons Council to take over the NNSA budget process, there is concern that some DOE contractors and some inside NNSA may support the move as a way to funnel more money to two questionable plutonium pit plants to upgrade the entire

nuclear arsenal. The report with the NDAA for FY 2021 affirms the unjustified pursuit of pit production at two sites, Los Alamos National Lab and the Savannah River Site.

“While forces exist that are pushing for two pit plants and replacement of all pits in all weapons, we fully expect that this tenuous position will erode as costs continue to increase, schedules slip and technical challenges deepen,” said Clements. “Efforts by DOD, the Nuclear Weapons Council and some senators to take over the NNSA budget to boost pit production is a provocative move that will only decrease national security and curtail independence of DOE and it must be soundly rejected,” added Clements.

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Notes:

Senate report on NDAA, see sections 3111-3116, starting on page 405:

<https://www.congress.gov/116/crpt/srpt236/CRPT-116srpt236.pdf>

Senate documents on NDAA, June 23, 2020:

<https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/press-releases/chairman-inhofe-and-ranking-member-reed-file-fiscal-year-2021-national-defense-authorization-act>

Letter by Secretary of Energy Dan Brouillette, June 29, 2020 opposing the provisions in the NDAA:

<https://srswatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Secretary-Brouillette-Letter-to-Chairman-Inhofe-on-NNSA-language-June-29-2020.pdf>

Amendment by Senators Manchin and Murkowski to strip out language related to DOD’s attempt to take over NNSA budget, June 2020:

<https://srswatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Manchin-Murkowski-2361-NNSA-June-2020.pdf>

Senator Cantwell statement against the provision in the NDAA: June 29, 2020: “Cantwell Blasts “Egregious” Legislation That Could Divert Billions From Nuclear Waste Clean-Up, Other Critical Energy Department Programs - Senate currently debating bill that would erode civilian control over spending on nuclear arsenal”:

<https://www.cantwell.senate.gov/news/press-releases/cantwell-blasts-egregious-legislation-that-could-divert-billions-from-nuclear-waste-clean-up-other-critical-energy-department-programs>

See language on plutonium pits in Senate NDAA report on pages 416-417:

<https://www.congress.gov/116/crpt/srpt236/CRPT-116srpt236.pdf>