

**Chairman Lamar Alexander Opening Statement
Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development**

**Hearing to Review the FY2020 Budget Request for the National Nuclear
Security Administration**

April 3, 2019

(As prepared for delivery)

The Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development will please come to order.

Today's hearing will review the administration's fiscal year 2020 budget request for the National Nuclear Security Administration.

First, I would like to thank our witnesses for being here today, and also Senator Feinstein, with whom I have the pleasure to work with again this year to draft the Energy and Water Appropriations bill.

Our witnesses today include: Ms. Lisa Gordon-Hagerty, the Administrator of the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA); Dr. Charles Verdon, Deputy Administrator for Defense Programs; Dr. Brent Park, Deputy Administrator for Defense Nuclear Nonproliferation (Dr. Park is a former Associate Laboratory Director from Oak Ridge National Laboratory); and Admiral Frank Caldwell, Deputy Administrator for Naval Reactors.

Our subcommittee has a good record of being the first of the appropriations bills to be considered by the Committee and by the Senate each year. For each of the past four years, Senator Feinstein and I have been able to have our bill signed into law.

Last year, we worked together in a bipartisan way on the fiscal year 2019 Energy and Water Development Appropriations bill that was signed into law before the start of the fiscal year – the first time that happened since 2000.

In last year's appropriations bill we provided \$15.2 billion for the National Nuclear Security Administration, including \$1.9 billion for the six life extension programs, which fix or replace components in weapons systems to make sure they're safe and reliable.

We also funded the Uranium Processing Facility at the Y-12 National Security Complex at \$703 million, which will continue to keep this project on time and on budget, with a completion year of 2025 at a cost no greater than \$6.5 billion.

I look forward to working with Senator Feinstein on another strong bill this year.

We're here today to review the administration's fiscal year 2020 budget request for the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA), the semi-autonomous agency within the Department of Energy that is responsible for a vital mission—maintaining our nuclear weapons stockpile, reducing the global dangers posed by weapons of mass destruction, and providing the Navy with safe and effective nuclear power.

The president's fiscal year 2020 budget request for the NNSA is \$16.5 billion, an increase of \$1.3 billion (or 8 percent) over last year (the fiscal year 2019 enacted level).

Today, I'd like to focus my remarks and questions on three main areas: Effectively maintaining our nuclear weapons stockpile; keeping critical projects on time and on budget; and supporting our nuclear Navy.

When the Senate agreed to ratify the New Start Treaty in December 2010, we also agreed to support funding to modernize and maintain our nuclear weapons stockpile, plus the facilities to do the work.

A vital part of NNSA's mission is completion of the five ongoing life extension programs, which fix or replace components in weapons systems to make sure they're safe and reliable.

The budget request includes \$2.1 billion to continue the life extension programs. I want to make sure we are spending taxpayer dollars effectively.

Completing all of the work that needs to be done for these weapons systems will result in a higher workload than the weapons program has had in any time since the height of the Cold War, and it will require a large number of highly-trained experts at the production sites, like Y-12 in Oak Ridge Tennessee, the weapons laboratories, and the federal employees that work for NNSA.

I'd like to hear more today about whether NNSA has enough qualified people to do this work.

I would also like to discuss today whether NNSA will be able to keep the life extension programs on time and on budget.

The NNSA is responsible for some of the largest construction projects in the federal government.

Senator Feinstein and I have worked hard to keep costs from skyrocketing. We want to make sure hard-earned taxpayer dollars are spent wisely and that these projects are on time and on budget.

First we focused on our oversight on the Uranium Processing Facility in Tennessee. We held routine meetings with the Department's leadership to discuss the project—particularly how the Department implemented the recommendations of a Red Team review, completed in 2014, to get the project on track.

After completing more than 90% of the design for the nuclear facilities, NNSA began construction of the Uranium Processing Facility last year.

I'd like to hear more about the progress on construction from the witnesses today.

Senator Feinstein and I also worked with the Department on ways to get excess plutonium out of South Carolina more quickly and for less cost. Last year, Secretary Perry canceled the MOX project in favor of the Dilute and Disposal alternative, which the Department of Energy estimated will save taxpayers more than \$20 billion.

I'd like to hear more today on the progress NNSA is making at removing the plutonium from South Carolina.

Lastly, the NNSA is restarting our ability to make plutonium pits for the stockpile. The budget request includes \$712 million for plutonium sustainment, which is 97% more than the current funding level. This difficult, but important work, will be done in New Mexico and South Carolina.

The NNSA has decided to use existing facilities and expertise in New Mexico to make some pits, and repurpose the MOX facility in South Carolina to make the remainder.

That's a good plan and I support it.

I want to hear from Administrator Gordon-Hagerty today how NNSA is applying the lessons we learned from UPF and MOX to make sure we get the pit production restart done on time and on budget.

Naval Reactors is responsible for all aspects of nuclear power for our submarines and aircraft carriers.

Naval Reactors has a lot on their plate right now—they are designing a new reactor core for the next class of submarines, refueling a prototype reactor, and building a new spent fuel processing facility for nuclear waste from defense activities.

Admiral Caldwell and I had an opportunity talk about the new spent fuel processing facility earlier this week. It is a part of the Navy's consolidated interim storage for its used nuclear fuel.

The Navy's program shows that it can be done safely and effectively, but that does not replace the need for a permanent repository at Yucca Mountain. That used nuclear fuel will still need to go to Yucca Mountain once it is built.

I look forward to Admiral Caldwell's comments today on the progress he's making on his important work, and particularly how Naval Reactors stores used nuclear fuel.

I'd also like to hear what is being done to keep the new Columbia-Class submarine design on track.

The NNSA needs to complete a lot of important work, and this work is going to require good planning and effective oversight.

I look forward to working with Administrator Gordon-Hagerty as we begin putting together our Energy and Water Appropriations bill for fiscal year 2020, and also with Senator Feinstein, who I will now recognize for her opening statement.

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