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'OUR NATION CONTINUES TO BENEFIT FROM THE SECURITY PROVIDED BY A SAFE, SECURE, RELIABLE AND EFFECTIVE NUCLEAR DETERRENT', US SECRETARY OF ENERGY, SAMUEL BODMAN, FEBRUARY 15, 2005

'Nuclear Nonproliferation Effort Includes 70 Nations, Bodman Says', Washington File, February 15, 2005.

U.S. Department of Energy
February 15, 2005

Senate Armed Services Committee

Oral Testimony of Secretary of Energy Samuel Bodman

Chairman Warner, Senator Levin and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the Administration's priorities for nuclear weapons and threat reduction programs, and DOE's environmental cleanup program. Before I start, I also want to thank all of the members for their strong support of our critical national security activities.

As the members of the committee know, the Energy Department's programs under the National Nuclear Security Administration support three fundamental national security missions:

- Assuring the safety and reliability of the U.S. nuclear weapons stockpile,
- Reducing the threat posed by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and
- Providing reliable and safe nuclear reactor propulsion systems for the U.S. Navy.

Our nation continues to benefit from the security provided by a safe, secure, reliable and effective nuclear deterrent. For the past eight years, the Secretaries of Defense and Energy have reported to the President that the nuclear weapons stockpile remains safe, secure and reliable. I will join the Secretary of Defense soon in my first assessment of the state of our nuclear weapons stockpile.

This assessment of the stockpile is based not on nuclear tests, but on cutting-edge scientific and engineering tools, extensive laboratory tests, field-testing of non-nuclear components, and sound technical judgments. Each year, we are gaining a more complete understanding of the complex physical processes underlying the performance of our aging nuclear stockpile. This understanding gives us an increased confidence in our ability to accurately assess the reliability and effectiveness of the weapons in our stockpile.

A robust defense research-and-development and industrial base -- which includes a responsive nuclear weapons infrastructure -- is critically important to achieving our defense goals. The elements of a responsive infrastructure include the people, the science and technology base, and the facilities and equipment to support a right-sized and secure nuclear weapons enterprise. It also involves a transformation in engineering and production practices that will enable us to respond more rapidly and flexibly to emerging needs.

A near halt in nuclear weapons modernization over the past decade has taken a toll on our ability to be responsive to changing defense needs. But we are restoring lost capabilities -- such as the ability to manufacture plutonium "pits," the triggering devices needed for many weapons -- and we are modernizing other capabilities, in order to meet the demanding schedules of warhead refurbishment programs. These efforts will help us meet the President's vision of the smallest nuclear stockpile consistent with our nation's security.

One of our most important projects is the National Ignition Facility (NIF) at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, an essential component of the Stockpile Stewardship Program and of a responsive nuclear infrastructure. Using advanced laser and computer technologies, the NIF will be capable of simulating the heat and pressures of a nuclear explosion, which will provide essential data in assessing the potential performance of nuclear weapons. In the absence of underground testing, this tool will give us increased confidence in evaluating the reliability and effectiveness of our stockpile.

Another important aspect of the weapons complex is security, a responsibility that has become more critical in the post-9/11 era. Because of the need for additional and upgraded facilities and equipment to ensure the safety and protection of our nuclear weapons infrastructure, funding for Safeguards and Security in NNSA has increased by almost 400 percent during this Administration, which is a strong indicator of the priority Congress and the Administration place on our security mission.

Let me now turn to nuclear non-proliferation and threat reduction programs. Acquisition of nuclear weapons by rogue states or terrorists is a grave threat to the United States. Our ability to counter this threat requires close coordination in threat reduction and nonproliferation efforts with the Departments of State and Defense.

Under programs such as the Global Threat Reduction Initiative, which we established in May 2004, DOE works with more than 70 countries to secure dangerous nuclear and radioactive materials, halt the production of new fissile material, detect the illegal trafficking or diversion of nuclear material, and ultimately destroy surplus weapons-usable materials.

Contributing to the Department's national security mission is the naval reactor propulsion program, whose mission is to provide the U.S. Navy with safe, militarily effective nuclear power propulsion plants and ensure their continued safe, reliable and long-lived operation. Nuclear propulsion plays an essential role in ensuring the Navy's ability to respond anywhere America's interests are threatened.

Closely related to the Department's nuclear defense mission is the cleanup of various sites around the country that have been contaminated through the years as a result of the development and sustainment of our nuclear defense capability. We have reformed the cleanup process for these sites, which has resulted in accelerating the timetable and reducing the cost, while continuing to safeguard human health and the environment. We will soon close three sites: Rocky Flats in Colorado, and Mound and Fernald in Ohio. I would like to take this opportunity to express my deep appreciation to Chairman Warner, all members of this Committee, and in particular Senator Lindsey Graham, for their hard work to pass legislation embodied in the Ronald W. Reagan National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2005 which allows the Department to continue the vital cleanup at the Savannah River Site and the Idaho National Laboratory.

Mr. Chairman, thank you again for the opportunity to be here today, and now I would be pleased to answer any questions.

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