

## E&W Member Day Remarks – Rep. Garamendi (CA-08)

I join you today to call the committee's attention to the billions of dollars being spent on our nuclear weapons programs and raise significant concerns that momentum is leading us in a dangerous direction. We in Congress have a duty to allocate the taxpayer dollars on programs in a responsible manner that avoids unnecessary and excessive expenses, but instead we're spending billions on wasteful weapons programs.

This year's Department of Energy budget request includes \$19.8 billion dollars for "Weapons Activities", a \$2.7 billion increase from the FY23 enacted levels. These ever-growing costs reflect the irrationality which has seized our nuclear policy. In the name of 'modernization', we've taken on billions of dollars of additional spending and every time we're asked for more, we keep growing the accounts without question or scrutiny. Even if we accept the need to preserve a "safe, secure, and effective deterrent" as long as nuclear weapons exist, current modernization plans are *not* necessary to maintain a capable deterrent for the foreseeable future.

Perhaps the most illustrative example of this theme is the modernization of plutonium production. "Plutonium pits", the hollow plutonium shell in nuclear triggers of nuclear weapons, are only one of the many components necessary to build nuclear weapons. But this year Department of Energy/NNSA requested nearly \$3 billion dollars for plutonium pit modernization. This number is incredibly high but doesn't even include the \$1.1 billion dollars requested for the W87-1 warhead, the \$1.4 billion for stockpile sustainment, the \$1.2 billion for the W80-4 warhead or the costs of approximately five other warheads and bombs.

Even for those who believe that we need to modernize our nuclear program these costs should be concerning. For anyone who claims that we should cut government funding, particularly when it is not justified by need or clear planning, our weapons programs should be a clear place to demand savings. A January 2023 GAO report, for example, found that NNSA has not developed a comprehensive schedule or cost estimate that meets GAO best practices. It has not identified all of the activities or milestones necessary to achieve an 80-pit-per-year production capability and senior officials have admitted they will not meet those deadlines.

In addition, it is not clear that the production levels are grounded in any true need, since America already has more than 4,000 plutonium pits and we lack scientific data to determine whether or when the pits need to be replaced. This excessive requirement will cost taxpayers \$18-\$24 billion according to GAO estimates, of which Savannah River construction will be \$7-\$11 billion, nearly triple the original estimate of \$3.6 billion

In House Armed Services Committee, I've been closely following a similar example in the \$118 billion dollar Sentinel Program which has such an egregious overrun that it triggered a review under a portion of statute known as 'Nunn-McCurdy'. The recent Nunn-McCurdy breach was triggered by an over 37% cost overrun for the \$118 billion Sentinel program, almost **260%** higher than the Air Force's first cost estimate in 2015. These costs are incredibly concerning and it demands carefully scrutiny of whether the program's continuation in its current form is necessary or possible.

Although portions of that program are outside of this subcommittee's jurisdiction, the nuclear enterprise is seeing drastic cost overruns in the lines of effort that support the program in Energy and Water. For

example, the budget request for development at Livermore National Lab of the warhead for the Sentinel, the W87-1, is up 63% in the FY25 budget, and according to the recent Performance Evaluation Report (PER) for the lab, “only met a portion of the deliverables for the W87-1, with some baseline schedule deliverables missed.”

Likewise, in Sandia’s PER, it is said to have, “missed key intermediate deliverables for the W87-1 program and experienced technical challenges in component development, resulting in a missed FY2023 Program Milestone and increased schedule risk.” Together, these “schedule” problems are likely to lead to program delays and likely major cost overruns for the W87-1.

These costs are unsustainable and, I fear, reflective of misaligned priorities. When 80% of NNSA’s budget request is going to these modernization programs and only 20% to nonproliferation, we should pause and think hard about where we should spend our resources.

Inevitably, we must reconcile our infinite desires with our limited means. That means making hard decisions about how and where to spend taxpayer dollars. Billions of dollars and at least a decade has been spent justifying weapons programs, instead of the energy programs that improve taxpayers’ lives. This must stop. Rather than pouring money into pits, let’s spend our Energy and Water appropriations on renewable energy and clean water.