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ECA March Bulletin Now Available Online

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The February 2016 Bulletin is now available and can be read online [here](#).

Stories include:

- Moniz Expresses Support for Private Nuclear Storage
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If there are any stories you'd like featured in next month's issue or important news you'd like to share, please feel free to contact devon@energyca.org.

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Obama's fizzled nuclear vision

Politico

March 31, 2016

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President Barack Obama, the Nobel Peace Prize winner who has called for ridding the world of nuclear bombs and missiles, is hosting world leaders on Friday to discuss the urgent need to prevent the further spread of doomsday weapons.

But he's drawing fire from arms control advocates who say his policies are undermining those very same goals — by cutting the proposed budget for nuclear security while increasing spending to upgrade the U.S. atomic arsenal. Even the administration leaders overseeing Obama's efforts acknowledge that budget constraints, souring relations with Russia and an aging U.S. nuclear deterrent have posed unforeseen obstacles to the grand vision of a nuclear-free world that he outlined in an April 2009 speech in Prague.

"Our closest friends and allies are critical, but of course they want us to do more, and we want to do more," Elizabeth Sherwood-Randall, the deputy secretary of energy, told POLITICO in an interview Thursday. As for Obama's goals for reducing the global nuclear threat, she said, "we can't achieve those all in this administration. The president has noted that frequently. But we certainly have made a lot of progress."

Critics outside the administration are far more blunt, saying the nuclear weapons modernization that Obama wants to carry out will increase the chances of an atomic arms race with countries like Russia. They say even the D.C. summit that the president will address on Friday is focused on securing only about 2 percent of the material worldwide that could be fashioned into an atomic bomb.

Donald Trump waves as he gets into his vehicle in Washington on Thursday, following a meeting with the Republican National Committee.

"I have a hard time calling this a nuclear security summit," said Bruce Blair, a former Air Force nuclear launch officer who co-founded Global Zero, an international movement seeking the elimination of nuclear weapons that was fueled by Obama's Prague speech. "The Prague vision has been just empty calories."

Instead, with U.S.-Russia relations at a post-Cold War low, reports indicating the Islamic State and other terrorist groups are seeking nuclear or radiological material, and North Korea openly threatening nuclear war, a president who was once a knight in shining armor to the arms control community is increasingly viewed as a disappointment — even with his success in negotiating a deal to delay Iran's nuclear weapons program.

"It is debatable whether other countries will go nuclear," said Richard Burt, a former ambassador to Germany who negotiated the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty with Russia. He expressed dismay at Obama's push for more money to upgrade U.S. nuclear weapons, saying, "We are on the verge of a massive and very expensive program of nuclear modernization across the board."

Members of Congress have also expressed concern. On the eve of the summit, half a dozen Democratic senators penned a letter to Obama urging him to "redouble" his efforts to reduce nuclear threats.

Obama's nuclear critics aren't all your typical peaceniks. Blair's group, for instance, boasts several former secretaries of state and defense among its supporters. Its other leaders include retired Marine Corps Gen. James Cartwright, who was the top commander of the U.S. nuclear arsenal before becoming Obama's vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Blair, who now teaches at Princeton University, contends that the administration's efforts at keeping nuclear fuel from getting into the wrong hands are missing the bigger picture. That's because they focus heavily on locking down highly enriched uranium that could be pilfered from civilian research facilities, even though military facilities around the world contain much more bomb-grade material, including in countries like Pakistan that have fewer controls than other nuclear states.

"There is the equivalent of 200,000 nuclear weapons in the world in the form of highly enriched uranium and plutonium," he added. "That is a lot, and that number has not decreased at all on Obama's watch."

By virtually ignoring the other 98 percent of material, he argues, we are "sleepwalking into the future."

Meanwhile, current and former government officials estimate that efforts spearheaded by the administration to lock up or destroy civilian stockpiles of highly enriched uranium have ultimately been a wash because other facilities have increased their reprocessing of spent nuclear fuel into weapons-grade material. The increase is equal to the same amount, or about 10,000 weapons' worth.

In their letter to Obama this week, the Democratic senators urged him to dedicate more resources to the International Atomic Energy Agency to "reinforce proliferation barriers" and seek a ban on the production of highly enriched uranium and plutonium. They said the administration could also pursue goals such as "ensuring the security of fissile, radiological, and other nuclear materials, eliminating excess nuclear stockpiles, [and] converting or shutting down weapons-grade uranium fueled reactors."

President Obama has less than ten months to deliver on any of the promises he might make during this week's Washington D.C. Nuclear Security Summit. That might be enough time to make some final achievements—it is expected that a 1987 treaty on nuclear protection will finally have enough signatories

to be put into effect this week, for instance—but it will not be nearly enough time to modernize the United States' rusting and neglected nuclear infrastructure. While outdated weapons arsenals have long been a target of energy experts and military watchdogs, the safety of nuclear power plants has also taken on a new urgency in the wake of the Brussels terrorist attacks, before which the suspects reportedly planned an attack on a Belgian nuclear site. In a report issued this month, by the Nuclear Threat Initiative, an anti-proliferation group, seven of 24 countries received the lowest scores possible for the safety of their nuclear facilities. In the United States, more than half of the country's nuclear reactors are over 30 years old, and a 2014 Pentagon report put a price tag of billions on restoring nuclear weapons infrastructure. The following images are just one look at the weathered reactors, aging planes and Cold War-era command posts that are only becoming more pressing in the age of ISIL and unconventional warfare. Above, Indian Point in Buchanan, New York, nuclear facility was shut down on Tuesday after an inspection revealed about 200 faulty bolts that hold plates together inside the reactor. In the past year, a power failure, transformer fire and alarm fire have all struck the plant, prompting calls to shut down the 40-year-old plant.

They also called on Obama to propose again that the U.S. and Russia reduce their nuclear arsenals to 1,000 weapons and 500 delivery systems apiece, or less than half than they currently have deployed — an issue that causes particular consternation among the arms control community.

Instead, critics argue that the administration is taking steps that undercut overall nuclear security.

The administration's budget request for countering nuclear proliferation next year is \$1.8 billion, or roughly \$132 million less than what it sought last year. Meanwhile, spending on nuclear weapons is up \$396 million to \$9.2 billion, according to an analysis by the Nuclear Threat Initiative, co-founded by former Democratic Sen. Sam Nunn and former Republican Sen. Richard Lugar.

The largest proposed reduction is in the Global Material Security program, which is run by the Department of Energy's National Nuclear Security Administration and "has the task of improving the security of nuclear materials around the world, securing orphaned or disused radiological sources, and strengthening nuclear smuggling detection and deterrence," said Kingston Reif, director for disarmament and threat reduction policy at the Arms Control Association.

Sherwood-Randall, who oversees the NNSA and its nuclear weapons labs, said the budget "reflects where we think we can make the most progress in the coming year," including locking down fissile material, taking fissile material off the global playing field, working to prevent and counter proliferation.

"The fact the budget is not the same as it was seven years ago reflects the progress we have made on many fronts," she said.

Yet she acknowledged that the administration faces many competing priorities. "Of course we'd love to have more funding."

Burt, the former ambassador, acknowledged that nuclear powerhouse Russia is the main impediment to further arms reductions, especially because "Russian nuclear doctrine has become more expansive" as the U.S. has sought to reduce the role of strategic weapons. (Russia is not attending the summit.)

But Burt believes Washington could be doing more to engage Moscow on this issue. "We are at a pretty disappointing state of affairs," he said.

Blair agrees. "I don't think we are trying hard enough to bring [Russian leader Vladimir] Putin to the table," he said.

Reif, meanwhile, said the U.S. could reduce the chances of an arms race by stepping back from particularly destabilizing moves. He reported Friday that the Air Force is considering developing a new nuclear-armed intercontinental ballistic missile that would have the "modularity" to be

mounted on a mobile platform — something the U.S. didn't do even during the Cold War.

"Despite the fact that the United States did not deploy mobile ICBMs during the Cold War and that the Air Force estimates such forces would cost at least \$80 billion more over the next 50 years than retaining only silo-based missiles, the service appears poised to design a missile that will keep that option open," Reif said.

Obama's deputy energy secretary defends the new investments in the nuclear arsenal, saying they do not come at the expense of reducing overall nuclear dangers.

"We have reduced our reliance on nuclear weapons in this administration through a series of policy decisions taken by the president," she said. "At the same time, [we are] committed to the investments required to ensure the arsenal is safe, secure and effective at lower numbers. That requires investment in both weapons life extension programs and in infrastructure."

She also insists that the summit in Washington is poised to make real progress, hoping to secure pledges from numerous countries to turn supplies of highly enriched uranium into low-enriched uranium that cannot be used for weapons. Other goals include seeking a halt to plutonium reprocessing, getting new commitments on helping stop nuclear smuggling and making the global nuclear security summit a biannual tradition.

But for many advocates of halting the spread of nuclear arms, the items not on the agenda are what needs more attention.

"Pakistan's nuclear weapons are increasing every day," Blair said. "And they don't have safety features. We still have Cold War like nuclear operations and doctrine," which he said raises the risk of miscalculation. "Are we keeping one step ahead of ISIS? Or are we doing too little, too late."

"We are not really getting rid of this stuff," Blair added. "It is still being produced."

Preserving Yucca licensing oversight sought

Pahrump Valley Times

April 1, 2016

[LINK](#)

Nevada Congressmen Cresent Hardy and Mark Amodei sent a request to a congressional subcommittee to preserve funding for local governments in 10 counties, including Nye, that would be affected by Yucca Mountain if the licensing process moves forward.

Under the request to the the House Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development, Nye County would receive \$1.5 million and the remaining nine counties, including Inyo in California and Clark, would each receive \$350,000.

Hardy's spokesman, Jacob Fullmer, said the funds are about protecting Nevada counties' best interests.

"This request is focused on safeguarding local communities' best interests, and making sure the affected counties have enough funds to do an effective job of overseeing any potential licensing process for Yucca if it were to start moving forward," Fullmer said.

In the March 15 letter to the subcommittee, Chairman Mike Simpson and ranking member Marcy Kaptur, Hardy and Amodei asked to include "programmatic" funding levels in the Energy and Water Development, and Related Agencies' FY 2017 appropriations bill to fund the Affected Units of Local Government (AUGL), as defined in the Nuclear Waste Policy Act of 1982.

The Act designated 10 counties as AULGs because of their proximity to the proposed repository and the necessity for those counties' governments to conduct oversight and participate in the licensing process.

Affected counties shouldn't get caught with the cost of providing local oversight on a potential federal project of this size, Fullmer said.

"Hardy has always said that Nevadans should be involved in the decision of Yucca Mountain," he added. "This appropriations request would guarantee that these counties have the resources they need to be able to take part in a meaningful way to protect the best interests of Nevadans."

The House Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development is within the U.S. House Appropriations Committee. The committee oversees appropriations bills in Congress along with the U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations.

According to the 1982 Act, the funds could be used for a large variety of things, including "for purposes of enabling such state or affected unit of local government."

This includes reviewing activities with respect to the Yucca Mountain site for purposes of determining any potential economic, social, public health and safety, and environmental impacts of a repository on such state, or affected unit of local government and its residents, according to the document.

It also includes requesting information from, and making comments and recommendations to, the secretary of energy regarding any activities taken with respect to such site, the document states.

"That's why we felt pretty comfortable in saying the funds could be used to help county officials protect the best interests, including safety, of Nevada residents," Fullmer added.

Fullmer said the request is one of many steps that are part of the appropriations process.

“This is one of many requests they receive and it is yet to be determined if the bill itself will receive a vote from the entire House of Representatives,” he said.

The Hardy and Amodei letter came two days before two congressmen from other states sent a letter to U.S. Secretary of Energy Ernest Moniz stating the Energy Department had an “obligation” to complete licensing for the Yucca Mountain project.

Feds Plan to Send Nuke Waste to N.M.

Emergency Management: The Santa Fe New Mexican

March 31, 2016

[LINK](#)

(TNS) - The U.S. Department of Energy announced Wednesday that it plans to ship more than 6 tons of weapons-grade plutonium more than 1,400 miles from a national laboratory in South Carolina to a nuclear waste dump in Southern New Mexico when the facility — shut down two years ago by a radiation leak — reopens for waste storage, possibly by the year’s end.

Despite the costly leak at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant near Carlsbad that broke the facility’s promise to “start clean, stay clean,” and concerns about transporting the hazardous material across the nation, federal officials say WIPP is crucial to national security — and the cheapest place to put the plutonium.

South Carolina is fining the Department of Energy \$1 million for each day it fails to remove the plutonium from the Savannah River Site, following a missed deadline this year. The department already faces more than \$88 million in fines from the state.

Billions of dollars have been funneled into a still-unfinished Mixed Oxide Fuel Fabrication Facility at the South Carolina lab where the waste was set to be

processed, and new estimates say it could cost up to \$30 billion more to complete the project. The plan for “dilution and disposal” of the plutonium at WIPP is estimated to cost \$400 million annually.

The plutonium will be blended with an oxide by workers at the Savannah River Site to dilute its potency, then packed inside large storage containers before shipment to WIPP.

In April 2015, Gov. Susana Martinez urged Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz to consider bringing new nuclear waste to the Carlsbad dump, saying it would “broaden their economic base.”

But since the radiation leak in February 2014 forced the storage site to close, questions have been raised about the ability of the U.S. Energy Department, the New Mexico Environment Department and Los Alamos National Laboratory — which improperly packaged the drum that burst and contaminated WIPP — to safely manage nuclear waste.

Undersecretary for Nuclear Security Frank Klotz signed the decision on the plutonium plan Wednesday, saying WIPP has a “proven process” for storing this type of waste stream. It already has received 5 metric tons of surplus plutonium from the Rocky Flats Plant in Colorado and the Hanford Site in Washington.

He called the new plan a “path forward.”

Cleanup work at WIPP from the radiation leak began earlier this year. In mid-February, remediation workers were evacuated and underwent medical evaluations after poor air quality was reported in the underground facility. Work continued at the site, but two areas of the facility were blocked off due to poor ventilation.

“The tension between shipping waste and reopening WIPP, versus protecting workers’ safety, is a really important issue,” New Mexico Environment Secretary Ryan Flynn said in an interview Wednesday.

Prior to the leak two years ago, he said, WIPP workers didn’t perform emergency response drills — they watched safety videos.

And old facilities weren’t maintained, he said, adding that such oversight led to a truck fire at WIPP in 2014, shortly before the radiation leak. After a vehicle washing station was removed to save money, oil built up on the vehicle, causing the fire.

The decision to ship plutonium from the Savannah River Site to WIPP came on the same day that the New Mexico Environment Department released a draft of its new consent order outlining waste cleanup requirements at Los Alamos.

Under the existing consent order, signed by the state, the Department of Energy and the lab in 2005, all nuclear waste was to be removed from lab property by December 2015. That deadline came and went with barrels of waste still stacked at lab sites, in part because of the WIPP shutdown. In January, the watchdog group Nuclear Watch New Mexico filed a notice with the state Environment Department of its intent to sue over the missed deadline.

But the new consent order doesn’t create new deadlines for waste removal at the lab.

“I still want the waste from Los Alamos to be prioritized — over anything,” Flynn said Wednesday. “That is the waste that is sitting in my backyard, that is sitting in the backyard of the people I am representing.”

But the lab and the state’s interests are likely to be pushed aside as the federal government focuses on other nuclear waste priorities.

The National Nuclear Security Administration has said its plan to dispose of the Savannah River Site plutonium will meet WIPP's standards and that workers will be protected from airborne emissions. The agency also said "no latent cancer fatalities are expected in the general public along the transportation routes and in the transportation crews" as the plutonium is shipped from South Carolina to New Mexico.

Jay Coghlan, director of Nuclear Watch New Mexico, said the ventilation problems at WIPP are worrisome and need to be resolved before the plutonium is stored there. "We don't think they can do it without compromising workers safety," he said of the plutonium plan.

Plutonium is highly carcinogenic when it's inhaled, he said.

Greg Mello, director of the Los Alamos Study Group, echoed Coghlan's concerns, but said he is in favor of the plan overall.

"It's simple, it's cheap and I think this is real cleanup," he said. "After decades of not really having a pathway for surplus plutonium, I think we have to bite the bullet."

Once the plutonium is safely stored in WIPP's underground salt repository, Mello said, it has little risk of overheating or leaking liquids, and it is likely to be safely contained.

The larger issue, he said, is what to do with the waste that continues to pile up from current nuclear weapons work as more than 7 tons of surplus plutonium in the U.S. awaits action.

Both U.S. senators from New Mexico weighed in on the issue Wednesday.

"If DOE moves forward with this plan, the state of New Mexico and Congress will need assurances that this proposal fully complies with WIPP's disposal criteria and with the Land Withdrawal Act," Sen. Tom Udall, D-N.M., said in a statement to The New Mexican.

Udall recently questioned Undersecretary Klotz about plans to restart plutonium pit production at Los Alamos. The senator's office said Wednesday that some of Udall's questions have yet to be answered.

Both he and Sen. Martin Heinrich, D-N.M., stressed the importance of safety.

"We have to go above and beyond to ensure the safety of our workers, communities, and the environment," Heinrich said in a statement. But he said the value of WIPP to national security goals and to New Mexico's economy "cannot be understated."

New Mexico rolls out cleanup proposal for federal lab

AP: The Santa Fe New Mexican

March 31, 2016

[LINK](#)

ALBUQUERQUE — New Mexico regulators on Wednesday unveiled a new draft proposal aimed at getting the federal government to clean up tons of hazardous waste and contamination left behind by decades of nuclear research and development at Los Alamos National Laboratory.

The proposal comes after LANL managers and the U.S. Department of Energy missed a December deadline to remove all nuclear waste from lab property. The multimillion-dollar cleanup was stalled following missteps at the lab that resulted in a radiation leak in February 2014 at a waste storage site in Southern New Mexico. An improperly packaged drum from LANL burst inside the underground repository, shutting down the facility.

But the proposal does not address the tons of radioactive waste still marooned at the lab due to the closure of the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant. That waste is contained in rows of stacked drums inside temporary tents.

During a recent meeting in Santa Fe before the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board, officials expressed concerns about their ability to respond to emergencies at the lab's largest waste storage compound, Area G. Plans are underway to treat the waste properly and put precautions in place to protect the site from a wildfire or radiation leak, they said, but the lab is not currently prepared to address such disasters.

Instead of setting a new deadline for finishing all of the cleanup work at the lab, the proposed new order sets milestones and targets over the next three years for addressing old dumps on lab property, contaminated sites within the town of Los Alamos and a plume of chromium-contaminated groundwater that's headed toward a Native American community and the Rio Grande.

New Mexico Environment Secretary Ryan Flynn said Wednesday that the transfer of that waste — contaminated gloves, tools, clothing and other material — is still a priority but it depends on the reopening of WIPP.

The goal of the new consent order is to accelerate the cleanup and leverage more federal dollars for the work, he said.

The current order, signed by the state and the U.S. Department of Energy in 2005, is outdated and hasn't been working, Flynn said.

Criticisms have been focused on its piecemeal approach and long-term goals and deadlines that were missed.

"This is our effort to get the process moving forward," Flynn said. "We've tried to make it more flexible."

That's one reason Flynn said the department didn't want to include a final date for finishing all the cleanup work.

With a clear plan, Flynn said he hopes the new proposal will encourage the government to restore funding for the cleanup. He suggested dedicating \$255

million a year to environmental work at Los Alamos, much more than the request of \$189 million for the next fiscal year.

The Department of Energy said in a statement Wednesday that it's committed to cleaning up legacy waste at the lab and looks forward to reviewing the state's proposal.

A series of public meetings will be scheduled in the coming weeks, and the public will have through May 16 to submit comments.

Jay Coghlan of Nuclear Watch New Mexico argued that there are "giant loopholes" in the proposal that would allow the Department of Energy to call the shots and even delay cleanup if funding isn't available.

He also voiced concerns about the lack of public participation in developing the order and the ability of the public to weigh in on future changes.

Watchdog groups have been critical of cleanup efforts at the lab, suggesting officials aren't going far enough to address the waste that was placed in drums, plastic bags and cardboard boxes and buried years ago in unlined pits and shafts on lab property.

Nuclear Watch New Mexico contends soil samples taken from Area G show detectable amounts of plutonium and americium.

The group maintains there are still threats to the regional aquifer that supplies water to several Northern New Mexico communities and that the radioactive waste needs to be moved before cleanup can begin at Area G.

"We want nothing short of comprehensive cleanup at the Los Alamos lab," Coghlan said. "That would be a real win-win for New Mexicans, permanently protecting our water and the environment while creating hundreds of high-paying jobs."

Information from The New Mexican was used in this report.

Savannah River Site cleanup misses targets

Augusta Chronicle

March 31, 2016

[LINK](#)

An electrical problem, an unexpected chemical reaction and machinery down for months are among the reasons the cleanup program at the Savannah River Site fell far below some production targets last year.

A report presented to members of the Citizens Advisory Board by Department of Energy planning analyst Rich Olsen detailed the missed targets.

For example, the year's target for nuclear-materials management was 20 containers, but only eight were completed. For liquid-waste vitrification, 156 canisters were planned but only 93 made it. And the saltstone process for liquid waste was to treat 1.2 million gallons but completed just 828,000.

The division did record some successes, such as closing one old-style tank, No. 16, as planned and disposing of less than 400 cubic meters of newly generated mixed and low-level waste as targeted.

Olsen's presentation summed it up: "How did we do in FY 2015? Answer: continued progress but with challenges."

Spokespersons for the contractors conducting these processes said there were no staffing changes as a result of the missed targets.

In the nuclear-materials processing, a power failure Jan. 7 that year in the HB Line led to discovery on Feb. 3 that equipment designed to keep the liquid mixed was not working. That equipment wasn't back online until Aug. 3, half

a year later, according to Barbara Smoak, communications director for Savannah River Nuclear Solutions.

“SRNS initiated an investigation of this event and conducted a root-cause analysis to identify the underlying causes of the event,” she said. “Based upon the results of the review, corrective actions were made. Facility modifications and safety-analysis revisions were part of the corrective actions.”

She notes that other operations on the HB Line and in the H Canyon did continue during those six months.

Olsen also said canister production was impacted in the Defense Waste Processing Facility by an anti-foam chemical added to keep vessels from filling with froth.

The chemical degrades into a flammable byproduct, which is no big deal in the melter, but engineers were surprised to find it in other parts of the process that weren’t as warm, according to Dean Campbell of Savannah River Remediation’s public affairs.

“When this finding was discovered, engineers studied the issue and proposed operational restrictions and additional compensatory controls that would allow DWPF to operate safely while this potential inadequacy is being resolved,” he said in an e-mail response to an inquiry. “DOE approved these interim restrictions/controls, and DWPF resumed operations.”

In the saltstone operations, Olsen’s presentation said they were affected by “higher than expected levels of mercury in liquid waste.”

However, Campbell said the amount of mercury was small and had no impact on saltstone operations.

Spokesperson: Layoffs affect around 60 employees at Savannah River Site MOX project

Aiken Standard

March 31, 2016

[LINK](#)

About 60 employees associated with the construction of the Mixed Oxide Fuel Fabrication Facility at the Savannah River Site were recently laid off.

A spokesperson for CB&I AREVA MOX Services, which is the project's contractor, told the Aiken Standard on Thursday that the staff members affected were white-collar administrative support staff workers.

"It has been spread out over a couple of months, but it pretty much was done by today," the spokesperson said. "There are no mass layoffs planned."

The spokesperson also said that the employees who were laid off "came from" both of the contractor's parent companies: AREVA and the CB&I Project Services Group.

President Barack Obama's administration wants to pull the plug on the MOX project and move forward with downblending, another disposal method for excess weapons-grade plutonium, because of cost overruns and the belief that MOX has become too expensive.

Billions of dollars have been spent so far, and the contractor claims about 70 percent of the MOX facility has been completed. The U.S. Department of Energy, or DOE, has disputed that figure.

The Obama administration's attitude toward MOX and restrictions imposed by the DOE and the National Nuclear Security Administration, or NNSA, were factors in the layoffs, according to the CB&I AREVA MOX Services spokesperson.

“Because of an obligation to taxpayers to build it (the MOX facility) as quickly and efficiently as possible,” the spokesman said, the contractor wants to continue at the current construction pace, which is designed to complete “at least” an additional 4 percent of the facility per year.

However, the DOE and the NNSA have “rejected” every procurement request and overtime is “very, very limited,” the spokesperson said. In addition, there are budgetary pressures on the MOX project.

As a result, the decision was made to take some of the money used to pay white-collar support staff and use the funds to hire more construction workers, the spokesperson explained.

The Aiken Standard contacted the spokesperson after reports from several sources indicated that there had been MOX-related layoffs.

“As of several weeks ago, there were approximately 2,000 employees” involved with the MOX construction project, the spokesperson said.

Dede Biles is a general assignment reporter for the Aiken Standard and has been with the newspaper since January 2013. A native of Concord, N.C, she graduated from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Workers removing radioactive sludge from leaking Hanford tank

Tri-City Herald

April 1, 2016

[LINK](#)

Hanford workers began pumping radioactive sludge Thursday evening from a double-shell waste storage tank at the nuclear reservation with an interior leak.

By 2 p.m. Friday, contractor Washington River Protection Solutions had retrieved about 14,500 gallons of sludge from the tank and work planned to continue through April 3.

“We’re pleased to have begun sludge retrieval and with the progress being made,” spokesman Jerry Holloway said.

The Department of Energy reached a settlement agreement with the state of Washington to start emptying waste from Tank AY-102 by March 4, 2016, and have the tank emptied by March 4, 2017. Waste is leaking from the tank’s inner shell but is still contained within the outer shell.

The tank farm contractor met the start deadline and removed about 550,000 gallons of liquid waste from the tank between March 3 and 9, transferring it to a sound double-shell tank near Hanford’s evaporation facility. The liquid waste volume will be reduced there.

But removing about 151,000 remaining gallons of sludge was expected to be tougher work.

Attempts were made on the next three weekends to start retrieving sludge.

Each time, there were equipment issues.

On the first weekend there was a problem with a meter needed to verify flow rates. The next weekend, the system had software issues. The third weekend, there was an issue with the slurry pump in the double-shell tank where the retrieved sludge was planned to be sent for storage.

“This is not uncommon when we start up retrieval with new equipment,” Holloway said. “A certain amount of troubleshooting is common.”

Washington River Protection Solutions planned to start sludge retrieval on a weekend when few workers were on site, then stop and evaluate data from

monitoring and sampling for chemical vapors on the project to determine whether protective measures needed to be adjusted.

Among steps taken this weekend was requiring workers in the tank farms involved to wear supplied air respirators.

Zones were established where workers without appropriate respiratory equipment are not allowed. The zones are in places where exhausters are outside tank farm fences or so near tank farm boundaries that a zone was needed to cover nearby area outside a tank farm.

137,000 gallons radioactive sludge left to be retrieved in next 11 months

Traffic was restricted on some roads in central Hanford, including a road that a transfer line crosses beneath.

Although sludge was not retrieved during the past three weekends, some additional liquid waste was removed. Some waste volume also was lost to evaporation in the high heat tank.

The sludge is being transferred through above-ground transfer lines to a double-shell tank closer to the Hanford vitrification plant, which is planned to eventually classify the waste for permanent disposal.

Tank AY-102 is Hanford's oldest double-shell tank. Workers had numerous problems as they built it.

Emptying the tank, which has held waste since about 1970, will allow it to be inspected to learn what caused the leak. That could provide helpful information regarding Hanford's other double-shell tanks, according to DOE.

It is estimated to have leaked about 60 gallons of waste that have been found in three places in the space between the tank's shells as of the end of 2015.

Hanford has 27 double-shell tanks still being used to hold waste emptied from leak-prone single-shell tanks, some of which have held waste since World War II. The waste is left from the past production of plutonium for the nation's nuclear weapons program.

Savannah River Site contract up for bids next year

Augusta Chronicle

April 1, 2016

[LINK](#)

The U.S. Department of Energy has released a draft of its request for proposals for the cleanup of leftover radioactive liquid waste at the Savannah River National Laboratory.

The draft posted online Thursday is to let potential bidders, other agencies and the public recommend improvements in the RFP before issuing it in earnest this summer. Companies will have about six months to prepare their bids for what could turn into 10 years of work if all options are exercised.

The current multi-billion contract with Savannah River Remediation expires June, 30, 2017.

The contract has some specific requirements, and the current contractor has missed some production quotas and is on track to miss some deadlines written into law about closing disused storage tanks, according to Tom Clements, director of the Columbia-based Savannah River Site Watch.

“A new contractor is going to have to do a better job in meeting legally mandated milestones for tank closure with the state of South Carolina,” he said.

He said Savannah River Remediation at least is upfront about its operations.

“I think they’ve been fairly open about the steps they’re taking to address the high-level waste at SRS,” he said. “I’ll give them credit for that.”

The Energy Department put some sweeteners in the new contract to reward beating production targets.

“DOE’s goal is to incentivize the contractor to meet or exceed the contract-performance requirements, and to do so within the total estimated contract price and completion dates. Incentives are structured to ensure a strong financial motivation for the contractor to achieve the contract requirements,” said the draft.

The department’s announcement said that representatives from companies interested in bidding can tour the site April 18 and sign up for one-on-one meetings that week.

U.S. will take weapons-grade uranium from Britain

USA Today

April 1, 2016

[LINK](#)

WASHINGTON — About 700 kilograms of weapons-grade uranium will be shipped from Scotland to the United States as part of a deal to provide the United Kingdom with nuclear material for cancer treatment and research.

British Prime Minister David Cameron announced the exchange Thursday during the biennial Nuclear Security Summit in Washington, calling it the largest-ever shipment of highly enriched uranium.

The National Nuclear Security Administration, citing security concerns, declined to say where the material will go in the U.S. It will be down-blended into low enriched uranium, which can be used as fuel in commercial nuclear power plants, said NNSA spokeswoman Francie Israeli.

In return, the U.S. will send a different type of nuclear material to the European Atomic Energy Community in France, where it will be converted into medical isotopes, according to Cameron's office.

"This is a landmark deal to turn nuclear material we no longer need into a cancer-fighting treatment that could potentially save many lives," Cameron said before the Washington summit. "It's a win-win, innovative solution that shows what working together with our international partners can achieve."

For the first time in 10 years, the U.S. government on Friday released an inventory of its highly enriched uranium, part of President Obama's effort to show a decrease in the world's supply of the dangerous, weapons-grade material. The inventory shows the U.S. had 586 metric tons in 2013, down from 741 metric tons in 1996.

"The danger of a terrorist group obtaining and using a nuclear weapon is one of the greatest threats to global security," Obama said Friday.

But nuclear watchdog groups in Scotland and the U.S. are criticizing the decision to ship the 700 kilograms — equal to about 1,543 pounds — of highly enriched uranium from the Dounreay nuclear site on the north coast of Scotland to the U.S.

"Nuclear waste should be dealt with as close to where it is produced as possible rather than risking transporting it in ships or planes," said Richard Dixon, director of the Friends of the Earth Scotland.

"The consequences of an accident during transit would be horrific."

Tom Clements of Savannah River Site Watch in South Carolina said the United Kingdom should be responsible for handling its own excess nuclear material. The Savannah River Site is a federal Energy Department facility in South Carolina that handles nuclear material.

"The U.S. and U.K. must explain why they are engaged in commerce in nuclear weapons materials when, from a nuclear non-proliferation perspective, this material should be left in the U.K.," Clements said.

Cameron's announcement said the deal ensures a continued supply of rare materials needed to help diagnose and treat cancer. Under the deal, the European Union could export the medical isotopes from France to the U.K. and other European countries, where the isotopes can help treat thyroid cancer by weakening or destroying cancerous cells.

Tensions escalate between Idaho attorney general, lawmakers

AP: Idaho State Journal

April 3, 2016

[LINK](#)

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — Mounting tensions between Idaho lawmakers and the Attorney General's office have revealed a political power struggle over whether the state's elected officials should be able to pursue legal opinions that match their own interests.

Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter announced on Monday that the office of Attorney General Lawrence Wasden needs to be scaled back and no longer be in charge of providing legal counsel to state agencies. Meanwhile, the Republican supermajority in the Idaho Legislature has found ways to funnel money for third-party legal opinions and has floated several legislative proposals directing Wasden's office on what to do.

"This is not an attack on the attorney general so much as it is frustration with the system," Otter said. "I would relish a change."

The attorney general's office represents the state in legal disputes and issues legal advice to state agencies and the Legislature. If lawmakers ignore that

advice — which happens regularly — the attorney general is still required to defend and enforce those laws.

The job also has meant sometimes pitting himself against members of his own Republican Party. In 2010, Wasden successfully sued the Idaho Land Board alleging they violated the state Constitution by setting rents below-market value on state-owned lakeshore lots. The board is made up of Wasden, Otter and three other constitutional officers. House Majority Caucus Chair John Vander Woude floated a bill that would kick Wasden off the board. While it failed this year, the proposal was supported by other House leaders.

Wasden has maintained that most lawmakers, including Otter, have not talked to him about their concerns. Wasden also counters that the 20-year old system of having the state's chief legal officer represent most state agencies and commissions has saved the taxpayers millions of dollars. Before 1996, state agencies hired their own counsel, typically much more expensive than using state attorneys.

"Do voters want attorneys who will be cheerleaders for agencies or attorneys providing legal advice based on the rule of law?" Wasden asked.

As a constitutional officer, Wasden answers to voters and not the governor or Legislature. Lawmakers can limit Wasden's job by either drastically reducing state funding or going to private attorneys for legal counsel. However, stripping Wasden's powers requires a constitutional amendment.

Lawmakers and state officials are protected under client-attorney privileges, which can result in clients freely criticizing the attorney general's office even though neither Wasden nor his staff can freely respond.

According to the National Association of Attorneys General, the seat sits at the "intersection of law and public policy." Under Wasden's tenure, that has meant devoting resources on issues like prosecuting Internet crimes against children, championing access to public records and consumer protection.

Wasden also came under fire for refusing to sign a waiver to allow a shipment of spent fuel rods to be sent to the Idaho National Laboratory. Wasden argues that the U.S. Department of Energy missed one of its cleanup deadlines.

This year, Rep. Jeff Thompson, R-Idaho Falls, introduced a non-binding resolution urging Wasden to sign the waiver. The resolution passed with minimal opposition in the House.

"I can't predict when someone is going to introduce a resolution in a House committee that (passes) without a hearing. I can't predict what someone might say at a press conference. I can't predict when someone might introduce a constitutional amendment to take me off the Land Board. I really can't predict those things, but I certainly stand ready to have those conversations," Wasden said.

The political power struggle shows no sign of stopping as lawmakers have vowed to renew their efforts in next year's legislative session. Right before adjourning for the year, Senate Majority Leader Bart Davis announced on the Senate floor that he was relinquishing holding the attorney general's budget as hostage after refusing to allow lawmakers to vote on it for more than a week.

His reasoning? It was too late to make any systematic changes to the office. However, Davis vowed to come back next year with a proposal that would see big changes in 2017.