

Senators Push Nonproliferation Budget

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Twenty-six senators sent a letter to the Obama administration requesting increased funding for nuclear nonproliferation programs in the fiscal year 2016 budget for the Energy Department.

The signatories of the Aug. 13 letter, led by Sens. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) and Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.), urged Shaun Donovan, director of the Office of Management and Budget, to “seek increased funding for vital nuclear material security and nonproliferation programs.”

The letter noted that the administration “proposed cuts to these programs over the last several years.”

The Obama administration’s budget for fiscal year 2015 would cut the Energy Department’s nonproliferation programs by \$399 million from the fiscal year 2014 appropriation. Fiscal year 2014 ends Sept. 30.

It is “not the time to pull back on nonproliferation,” the letter said, noting that recent terrorist actions serve as a reminder of the importance of “ensuing that terrorist groups and rogue states” do not obtain nuclear weapons and materials.

The Senate Appropriations energy and water subcommittee, chaired by Feinstein, increased funding for nonproliferation activities to nearly \$2.0 billion, \$423 million above the president’s request for fiscal year 2015. The subcommittee released its bill and draft report July 24, but no further action has been taken on the bill.

The increases include an additional \$136 million for the Global Threat Reduction Initiative (GTRI) and \$50 million for the International Nuclear Materials Protection and Cooperation program.

The letter said the GTRI played an important role in eliminating nuclear materials from 13 countries since 2009 and that “significant work remains” to secure nuclear material at “hundreds of sites spread across 30 countries.”

The senators urged the administration to work with the Senate to “ensure that critical nuclear material security” programs have the necessary resources. The letter urged the administration, in next year’s budget request, to build on the funding levels that the appropriations subcommittee approved for fiscal year 2015.

In addition to Feinstein and Merkley, the signers of the letter included 20 Democrats, Republican Sens. Lamar Alexander (Tenn.) and Lindsey Graham (S.C.), and independents Bernie Sanders (Vt.) and Angus King (Maine).

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