

June 25, 2010

Dr. John S. Foster, Jr.
Private Consultant
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One Space Park, E1-5021
Redondo Beach, CA 90278

Dear Dr. Foster:

Thank you for your letter dated May 19, 2010, regarding the 2010 Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) Report and the Administration's strategy for stockpile sustainment. We welcome the opportunity to address your concerns.

Before doing so, we would like to set forth what we hope is our shared objective: a solution to problems in the nuclear security enterprise that is politically and financially sustainable over the long term. The NPR addresses U.S. national security goals and details this Administration's commitment to sustaining an arsenal of nuclear weapons that meets 21st century standards of safety, security, and effectiveness. That commitment begins with the President and Vice President and reflects the full consensus of the National Security Council. Stockpile sustainment cannot be accomplished without revitalizing the nuclear security enterprise—and this effort, too, enjoys the Administration's full support. We are working with Congress to advance this agenda.

You have raised three concerns and we will address each in turn. Your first concern was that the NPR's "higher bar" for replacement life extension programs (LEP) will discourage exploration at the national weapons laboratories of the full spectrum of LEP options. In fact, we are committed to making sure that the technical community is not constrained in its exploration of technical options for warhead life extension. Accordingly, the NPR and supplemental guidance make it clear that the technical community is to consider all technical options as it studies how best to extend the life of existing warheads in order to meet stockpile management goals (i.e., increased safety, security, and reliability) without providing new military capabilities and without underground nuclear tests. The Laboratory Directors will make sure that the full range of LEP approaches, including refurbishment, reuse, and replacement of nuclear components, is studied on a warhead case-by-case basis. The NPR expresses a policy preference for refurbishment and reuse in decisions to proceed from study to engineering development—requiring Presidential authorization for replacement is an additional step

to make sure that no one mistakes life extension activities for the pursuit of new warheads. The Laboratory Directors, however, will be expected to provide findings associated with the full range of LEP approaches and to make a set of recommendations based solely on their best technical assessment of the ability of each LEP approach to meet stockpile management goals. As you rightly note, this is also essential to exercising the full suite of skills needed to sustain the nuclear deterrent. In choosing our course in this regard, we relied on the advice of the three sitting Laboratory Directors, who concluded in their April 9, 2010, statement on the NPR that this approach to life extension “provides the necessary technical flexibility to manage the nuclear stockpile into the future with an acceptable level of risk.”

Your second concern was that FY 2011-2015 funding increases in support of the nuclear enterprise may still be inadequate to the task of recovering from the last five years of declining budgets. In fact, we do not see a funding shortfall for FY 2011-2015.

The FY 2011-2015 budget request was shaped by our assessment of the ability of the enterprise, after a period of prolonged atrophy, to utilize increased funding to redress mission shortfalls. For FY 2011, we requested, and the President supported, the funding we considered necessary and executable. Our strategy is to “ramp-up” activity as the enterprise recovers. We have submitted plans for significant funding increases—from \$642M in FY 2011 to \$1.64B in FY 2015—an increase over prior plans that totals \$5.68B over five years. Our plan, described in the report submitted in response to the National Defense Authorization Act, FY 2010, Section 1251, calls for sustained investments at these higher levels so that over the next decade the United States will have invested over \$80B in the nuclear enterprise.

We do, of course, recognize that out-year budgets are projections. As designs of facilities such as the Uranium Processing Facility and the Chemical and Metallurgy Research Replacement Facility mature, and we achieve a fuller understanding of requirements, funding in future budget years, or target completion schedules, may require adjustment. We are committed to carrying out the intent of these and other initiatives to modernize the nuclear security enterprise.

Finally, we share your concern about the challenges of sustaining needed investments over the long term. We have clearly expressed this Administration’s long-term approach and our commitment to recapitalize the nuclear enterprise. This is long overdue. The Administration’s task now is to work with Congress to make sure that these essential investments have long-term support and, to this end, we have already provided Congress with detailed information. For instance, the Section 1251 Report, referred to above, focuses on sustaining the deterrent during the period of New START Treaty implementation and describes plans to sustain and modernize nuclear delivery systems, the nuclear stockpile, and associated infrastructure over ten years. The National

Nuclear Security Administration's (NNSA) Stockpile Stewardship and Management Plan, also known as the National Defense Authorization Act, FY 2010, Section 3113 Report, focuses on the needed capabilities of the nuclear security enterprise for the next 20 years.


We need a long-term, bipartisan approach to restoring our nuclear security enterprise. Your voice and that of your colleagues will be influential in building consensus for a responsible way forward. We hope that our plans for the nuclear enterprise will have your support.

Our senior staffs would welcome the opportunity to engage with you further on these issues at the classified level. Under Secretary of Defense Ashton B. Carter and NNSA Administrator Thomas D'Agostino will contact you shortly to determine how best to accomplish this. An identical response has been sent to the other signatories of your letter.

Sincerely,



Steven Chu
Secretary of Energy



Robert M. Gates
Secretary of Defense