



Savannah River Site Watch

**Savannah River Site Watch  
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**Congressional Armed Services Committees Set Path for Termination of \$17 Billion Plutonium Fuel (MOX) construction Boondoggle at DOE's Savannah River Site**

**MOX Debacle can be Terminated by Secretary of Energy if Requirements Met for "Alternative Option"**

**Columbia, SC** – The Armed Services Committees in Congress have laid out an approach that could lead to the termination of the mismanaged plutonium fuel (MOX) plant at the Savannah River Site.

The MOX-termination plan was presented on November 9 in the House-Senate conference report on the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2018.

The language in the report stipulates that MOX construction can be terminated if an "alternative option" meets several requirements that are certified by the secretary of energy. The "waiver" of construction language stipulates that two key criteria must be met:

The Secretary would be allowed to waive this requirement to carry out construction and project support activities related to the MFFF project if the Secretary submits to the congressional defense committees: (1) The commitment of the Secretary to remove plutonium intended to be disposed of in the MOX facility from South Carolina and ensure a sustainable future for the Savannah River Site and (2) Certification that an alternative option exists for carrying out the plutonium disposition program for the same amount of plutonium identified that was to be disposed of in the MOX facility is completed meeting the requirements of National Nuclear Security Administration Business Operating Procedure "BOP-03.07, Analysis of Alternatives" dated March 14, 2016 and that the total lifecycle cost, consistent with Government Accountability Office (GAO) cost estimating and assessment best practices as found in GAO-09-3SP "GAO Cost Estimating and Assessment Guide," of the alternative option would be less than half of the estimated remaining lifecycle cost of the mixed-oxide fuel program, estimates that should be of comparable accuracy.

“The language presented by the Armed Services Committees demonstrates that they realize that MOX is too costly and that a less costly and less risky option exist via disposing of plutonium as nuclear waste,” said Tom Clements, director of Savannah River Site Watch. “Given that a host of funding, design, construction and inspection problems pose daunting problems for continuation of the MOX project, we urge Congress to continue to take steps to terminate the mismanaged project in an orderly manner.”

The “alternative option” now being most discussed is the so-called “dilute and dispose” method whereby plutonium at the Savannah River Site would be mixed with a secret, inert material and disposed of as transuranic waste in the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) in New Mexico. DOE is supposed to develop a life-cycle cost estimate for expanded plutonium downblending at SRS but progress on the report appears to be slow. The capacity of WIPP for the downblended plutonium is also an issue that has not been resolved.

Small amounts of plutonium are currently being downblended at SRS in the K-Reactor, with the plutonium coming from a sample of “3013” storage cans that are examined for the condition of the cans and their plutonium contents.

SRS Watch has long supported the “immobilization” of plutonium in existing high-level nuclear waste at SRS, whereby the plutonium is glassified into high-level nuclear waste in robust disposal canisters. This disposal method is not currently receiving funding.

See NDAA conference report and “Joint Explanatory Statement” here:

**NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2018** – Conference Report – November 9, 2017

<http://docs.house.gov/billsthisweek/20171113/HRPT-115-HR2810.pdf>

See “Sec. 3121. Use of funds for construction and project support activities relating to MOX facility.”

#### **JOINT EXPLANATORY STATEMENT OF THE COMMITTEE OF CONFERENCE**

<https://rules.house.gov/sites/republicans.rules.house.gov/files/Joint%20Explanatory%20Statement.pdf>

See “*Use of funds for construction and project support activities relating to MOX facility (sec. 3121)*”

MOX plant construction is currently being funded in a Continuing Resolution at the Fiscal Year 2017 level of \$340 million, barely enough to keep the project going. The CR expires on December 8, at which time a decision on future funding will have to be issued. (See White House statement on CR, September 8, 2017: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/09/08/president-donald-j-trump-signs-hr-601-law>)

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#### **Notes:**

On October 12, 2017, two briefings on the MOX debacle were presented to the South Carolina Nuclear Advisory Council (NAC) in Columbia, SC. The DOE-NNSA presenter continued to say that MOX was not

sustainable, that it must be terminated, and that the cost estimate remains about \$17 billion and it won't be finished until 2048. The CB&I AREVA MOX Services presenter claimed progress was being made but did not explain how funding, construction and inspection problems could be overcome. SRS Watch director Clements attended the meeting.

**Agenda for Oct. 12 NAC meeting, with presenters' names:**

<http://www.admin.sc.gov/files/nac/Agenda%20for%20Oct%202012,%202017%20Meeting.pdf>

**DOE/NNSA presentation:**

<http://www.admin.sc.gov/files/nac/Raines%20GNAC%20Presentation%20OCT%202017.pdf>

**MOX Services presentation:** <http://www.admin.sc.gov/files/nac/Del%20Vecchio%20-%202010-12-17%20SCNAC%20MOX%20briefing%20FINAL.pdf>