

Dr. Strangelove Rides Again: Nuclear Power Permeates Bush's 2006 DOE Budget

Amidst record budget deficits and proposed deep funding cuts to schools, low income housing, veterans' health benefits, the Environmental Protection Agency, and numerous other domestic social programs, the Bush Administration has found even more money for the "Nuclear Power Relapse" than in the past.

George W. Bush's new Department of Energy (DOE) Secretary, Sam Bodman, unveiled DOE's 2006 budget request on February 7. The overall DOE budget is going down by 2% compared to Fiscal Year 2005 (FY05). But much of the \$475 million decrease is coming out of environmental clean up of DOE's numerous radioactively contaminated sites (see "Budget Battles" at www.ananuclear.org), as well as out of such crucial programs as energy efficiency/ renewable energy. While climate crisis culprits "Fossil Energy" would receive \$760 million--a whopping 18% increase over 2005 levels--subsidies for nuclear power would also increase significantly if Congress endorses Bush's proposals.

EFFICIENCY/RENEWABLES CUT

The proposed "Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy" budget is \$48 million less than last year, a decrease of nearly 4%. Ken Bossong, coordinator of the Sustainable Energy Coalition, bemoans this "bleeding" of core, proven efficiency and renewable energy programs that "can address the needs of the nation much more quickly" than other Bush energy proposals, such as nuclear-generated hydrogen (see below).

LIGHTS OUT

Incredibly, despite Secretary Bodman stating that repair and maintenance of the electricity transmission infrastructure would be high on his personal agenda, "Electric Transmission and Distribution" would suffer a 19.4% budget decrease, losing \$23 million from 2005 funding levels. This is despite

the Aug. 2003 Northeast/ Midwest power outage, the biggest in U.S. history, which forced the shutdown of numerous nuclear reactors due to loss of electricity to run safety systems. The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, with oversight on transmission and the infamous power outage, would also suffer a 13% budget decrease over last year.

NUCLEAR POWER SUBSIDIES

DOE's "Nuclear Energy, Science and Technology" division would have \$511 million with which to work in FY06, a 5.2% (\$25 million) increase over last year. \$191 million of this would go toward "Nuclear Energy Supply" R&D programs, an increase of \$20 million (or nearly 12% over last year). Several nuclear power promotional programs would receive increased funding.

\$70 million (a \$2.5 million, or nearly 4%, increase over FY05 funding levels) would go for the "Advanced fuel cycle initiative" to promote reprocessing of high-level radioactive waste. This is a pet project of Senate Energy Committee Chairman Pete Domenici (R-NM). Reprocessing results in large-scale liquid and gaseous radioactivity releases to air, water, and soil. It also risks nuclear weapons proliferation, which is why it has been banned in the U.S. since the Ford and Carter Administrations.

\$56 million (a \$6.4 million, or 13%, increase over FY05) would go for "Nuclear Power 2010" to grease the skids for site permits and construction/operating licenses for the first new reactors in three decades (the last order for a reactor that was actually completed in the U.S. was placed in Oct., 1973). "Nuclear Power 2010" was launched on Valentine's Day 2002 (perhaps to show love for the industry?), the very same day the Bush Administration recommended that Yucca Mountain was "suitable" for a national high-level radioactive waste dump,

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despite overwhelming scientific evidence and Western Shoshone Indian treaty rights to the contrary. NIRS is intervening against the Early Site Permits for the new reactors proposed for Clinton, IL, Port Gibson, MS, and North Anna, VA which "Nuclear Power 2010" seeks to support.

\$45 million (a \$5.3 million, or 13.4%, increase) would go for the Generation IV nuclear energy systems initiative -- research and development of an "advanced" or "next-generation" nuclear reactor which the nuclear establishment hopes to build at the above mentioned sites.

\$24 million (\$190,000 or nearly 1% more than FY05) would go for "university reactor infrastructure and education assistance," or outreach to 35 U.S. universities in order to assure the next generation of nuclear engineers, in the face of having as few as 130 nuclear engineering graduate students enrolled in the late 1990's due to the stagnation of the industry.

\$20 million (an \$11 million, or whopping 124% increase) would go for the "nuclear hydrogen initiative," related to the \$1.1 billion hydrogen-generating reactor that was proposed in last year's energy bill. The reactor would be built at DOE's Idaho National Engineering Lab, completely at taxpayer expense, a pork barrel project for pro-nuclear Idaho Republican Senator Larry Craig, next in line to chair the Senate Energy Committee. See NIRS fact sheet "Hydrogen Production by Nuclear Power," at

<http://www.nirs.org/factsheets/hydrogenbynuclear.pdf>.

YUCCA MOUNTAIN

DOE's proposed Office of Civilian Radioactive Waste Management (OCRWM) Yucca Mountain Project budget for 2006 is very revealing. Although bragging that Yucca would receive \$79 million more than last year (a 14% increase), what Bodman did not share is that this is half the amount the Bush Administration had hoped for. As recently as a year ago, Bush had proposed \$1.3 billion (with a B!) for the FY06 Yucca budget. But the Yucca juggernaut has hit some major roadblocks, including adverse rulings from the federal courts and the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission that have monkey-wrenched DOE's schedule for seeking permission

to build and open the national dump. Asking for only half the previously forecast budget is a tacit admission by the Bush Administration that its Yucca Mountain Project is in serious trouble right now.

Over \$85 million of the FY06 Yucca budget would go towards preparations for transporting high-level atomic waste, including \$33 million for issuing a design/build contract for the proposed Caliente, Nevada to Yucca Mountain rail line. This 319 mile long railway would cost a billion dollars to build.

NUCLEAR WEAPONS & CONTAMINATION: CLEAN UP, DON'T BUILD UP!

The Bush Administration proposes to spend \$4 million on research into the controversial "bunker buster" nuclear weapon, an initiative blocked by bipartisan opposition in both houses of Congress last year. It also proposes increasing funding towards preparing the Nevada Test Site so that full-scale nuclear weapons blasts could begin in as little as 18 months.

While "advancing" the nuclear arsenal, Bush's DOE proposes to decrease funding to "Environmental Management" (clean up at nuclear weapons complex sites contaminated during the Cold War) by nearly 8%, a loss of nearly \$550 million. DOE also proposes decreasing funding to "Environment, Safety, and Health" (the program meant to assist nuclear weapons complex workers with health care) by a whopping 24%, a loss of \$34 million. Again, see "Budget Battles" at www.ananuclear.org for more information on these nuclear weapons production complex issues. --Kevin Kamps, Feb. 9, 2005.

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