



PRESS RELEASE

House Armed Services Committee

Floyd D. Spence, Chairman

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GAO REPORT “HEIGHTENS CONCERNS” ABOUT STOCKPILE STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM AND DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY MANAGEMENT OF NATIONAL IGNITION FACILITY

A General Accounting Office (GAO) report released today (GAO/RCED-00-271: National Ignition Facility - Management and Oversight Failures Caused Major Cost Overruns and Schedule Delays) reveals cost overruns and delays for the National Ignition Facility (NIF) far in excess of current Department of Energy (DOE) estimates for the program. These new findings significantly heighten congressional concerns about DOE's management of NIF and the viability of the stockpile stewardship program, according to House Armed Services Committee Chairman Floyd Spence.

NIF is a critical effort within the stockpile stewardship program, the Administration's program to maintain the U.S. stockpile of nuclear weapons in the absence of underground nuclear testing. After years of assuring Congress that NIF was on schedule, within budget, and meeting technical milestones, DOE informed Congress last summer that the program was several hundred million dollars over cost and would be delayed by several years. The GAO report released today indicates that NIF will cost at least \$3.9 billion (\$1.8 billion more than DOE's original 1995 estimate) and will not be completed until 2008 (six years after the original target date). According to GAO, NIF's cost increases and delays are the result of, "poor laboratory management, which included weaknesses in planning, budgeting, and project control. DOE's oversight weaknesses contributed to cost and schedule problems..."

Spence reacted to the report, "These findings are extremely disquieting - not only does GAO project that the program will cost nearly *double* the level initially anticipated, but this report raises legitimate questions about the ability of DOE's science-based approach to adequately replace nuclear testing in maintaining a safe and effective U.S. nuclear weapons stockpile."

Spence continued, "Four years ago, I released a report on the Administration's stockpile stewardship program that warned, 'The [stewardship] program entails significant technological risks and uncertainties... the downsizing of DOE facilities and associated personnel reductions have created a serious deficiency in the nuclear work force.' These warnings remain as true today as they were then. The House Armed Services Committee will continue to closely monitor the NIF program and push for improved program management and oversight."

Spence also noted that the House Armed Services Committee championed landmark legislation in 1999 to address management problems at DOE by establishing the National Nuclear Security Administration

(NNSA) to manage U.S. nuclear weapons programs. “Failings such as this at DOE are all too common and well-documented, and were partly the reason behind Congress’ efforts last year to establish the NNSA. I expect this new organization to bring much-needed focus and intensity to solving both management and security failures that have been so persistent in the nuclear weapons complex.”

The report is available on the House Armed Services Committee website at <http://www.house.gov/hasc>.

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