

News from U.S. Rep. John Spratt (D-SC)  
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***Move raises questions about plutonium in SC***  
**House Republicans Kill Effort to Restore Cut to MOX Fuel Program**

WASHINGTON – Republicans on the House Rules Committee yesterday blocked an effort by U.S. Rep. John Spratt (D-SC) to restore \$10 million to the MOX fuel program – a program essential to moving plutonium shipped to South Carolina back out of the state.

“A successful MOX program is key to South Carolina’s exit strategy for plutonium,” said Spratt.

The MOX program, which would convert U.S. and Russian weapons-grade plutonium to fuel suitable for commercial reactors, is based on an agreement signed in 2000 by the two countries. The agreement calls for each nation to dispose of 34 metric tons of weapons-grade plutonium. A plant for converting plutonium to MOX fuel is slated to be built at the Savannah River Site (SRS), near Aiken, S.C.

Spratt’s effort to restore \$10 million to the program was in the form of an amendment to the Defense Authorization Bill, which the House is debating today. The amendment would have restored funding to the Russian effort, known as “Russian Fissile Materials Disposition.”

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) cannot execute the U.S. program without the Russian counterpart moving forward, because the agreement requires that the work be done in tandem.

Duke Energy, of Charlotte, N.C., the only potential customer of the MOX fuel to be produced at SRS, has said publicly that the success of the Russian program is critical to its involvement in the disposition program.

“The President and the National Nuclear Security Agency asked for \$98 million for the Russian effort next year,” said Spratt, “but Republicans on the House Armed Services Committee cut that request by more than 10 percent.

“As soon as I discovered the cut, I drafted an amendment that would restore the funding, and I invited Rep. Lindsey Graham (R-SC) to join me in offering the amendment. But the House Rules Committee would not allow the amendment to be considered on the House floor today,” Spratt said.

“I cannot believe that the House Republican Leadership, which controls the Rules Committee, did not make in order my amendment to restore \$10 million to this program. This action undercuts the MOX program, and is precisely the sort of uncertainty surrounding this program that has prompted Governor Hodges to demand enforceable assurances against program failure.

“The funding should be restored,” said Spratt, “and my amendment would do just that, providing the full Administration request for the Russian program. It simply does not make sense for Congress to undercut the President’s request at this early but crucial juncture in the plutonium disposition program. \$10 million is a fraction of the program’s cost, but the cut could be an early sign of weakening resolve – and that’s cause for concern.

“I will work now to see that the Senate restores funding for the full program when the House and Senate meet in conference on the defense bill,” Spratt said.

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