



April 13, 2016

Dear Members of Congress:

The Project On Government Oversight, Taxpayers for Common Sense, and National Taxpayers Union are opposed to continued funding for the Mixed Oxide Fuel Fabrication Facility (MOX) at the Savannah River Site in Aiken, South Carolina. We believe that cutting the program entirely is in the best interest of taxpayers and we urge you to strike the \$340 million for MOX construction from the FY2017 Energy and Water Appropriations Bill.

The MOX facility was designed to convert weapons-grade plutonium into mixed-oxide fuel for U.S. commercial nuclear reactors. Today, however, it is vastly over budget, behind schedule, lacks even a single potential customer, and could even be putting dangerous nuclear material at risk.

In 2002, the National Nuclear Security Administration estimated that the life-cycle cost of the MOX facility, which includes construction and operating costs, would total \$4 billion and the plant would be operational by 2007.¹ But delays and other missteps have led to skyrocketing costs and a completion date decades away.

A recently completed independent study by the Aerospace Corporation states that approximately \$47.5 billion in additional “life-cycle to go” costs will be required to complete the MOX project by 2044. But that cost estimate is only accurate if annual appropriations hold steady at \$500 million per year, which is about \$150 million more than recent funding levels. If the project continues to be funded at \$345 million per year, life-cycle costs will skyrocket to more than \$110 billion and the completion date won’t be until 2100.²

To date over \$5 billion has been spent on MOX construction which remains only partially complete. Further, the Department of Energy estimates that the project is running on a 25 percent re-work rate, meaning approximately a quarter of the equipment installed will need to be re-installed.³

¹ National Nuclear Security Administration, Report to Congress: Disposition of Surplus Defense Plutonium at Savannah River Site, February 15, 2002, p. 5-10. <http://www.nci.org/pdf/doe-pu-2152002.pdf> (Downloaded March 2, 2016)

² The Aerospace Corporation, Plutonium Disposition Study Options Independent Assessment Phase 1 Report, April 13, 2015, p. 3. <http://fissilematerials.org/library/doe15a.pdf> (Downloaded March 2, 2016)

³ Transcript of House Committee on Armed Services, Subcommittee on Strategic Forces Hearing on "Plutonium Disposition and the MOX Project," October 7, 2015.

Perhaps most alarmingly, the MOX facility was granted an exemption from an important nuclear security requirement. It could take the contractor 180 days to physically verify the presence of some special nuclear material—60 times the safety requirement.⁴ Members of Congress have also previously raised concerns over the billions of dollars spent on a facility with no customers and no substantial feedstock.⁵ And former Representative David Hobson (R-OH) stated that not cutting the project while he was in office is his biggest regret.⁶

The Department of Energy has identified an alternative to this program that they believe will be faster and cheaper.⁷ It's clear that MOX has failed the viability test and we urge you not to continue to fund this project.

For additional information, please contact Lydia Dennett or Danielle Brian at (202) 347-1122, or Autumn Hanna or Ryan Alexander at (202) 546-8500.

Sincerely,



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⁴ Edwin S. Lyman, Union of Concerned Scientists, Excess Plutonium Disposition: The Failure of MOX and the Promise of Its Alternatives, December 2014, p. 41.

<http://www.ucsusa.org/sites/default/files/attach/2015/01/Excess%20Plutonium%20Disposition.pdf> (Downloaded March 2, 2015)

⁵ 112th Congress, House of Representatives, Energy and Water Development Appropriations Bill Report, 2012, June 24, 2011, p. 138. <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CRPT-112hrpt118/pdf/CRPT-112hrpt118.pdf> (Downloaded February 5, 2013)

⁶ The Honorable David Hobson, "Former Rep. David Hobson: Not Cutting MOX Is My "Biggest Regret," February 9, 2016. <http://www.pogo.org/blog/2016/02/mox-radioactive-pork.html>

⁷ Memorandum from Ernest Moniz, Secretary of Energy, to President Barack Obama, regarding high priority issues, November 20, 2015. http://www.pogoarchives.org/m/nss/redacted_doe_memo_20151120.pdf