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**STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE DUNCAN HUNTER,
CHAIRMAN, MILITARY PROCUREMENT SUBCOMMITTEE
HEARING ON THE FISCAL YEAR 2000 BUDGET REQUEST FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY'S DEFENSE-RELATED PROGRAMS**

The Subcommittee meets today to consider the Department of Energy's budget request for Defense Related Activities. While the general public may think of the Department of Energy only in terms of petroleum exploration technologies and alternative energy sources, this Subcommittee has a much different perspective. We recognize the Department as responsible for a critical element of our national security: maintaining the safety, security, and reliability of the Nation's nuclear weapons stockpile. This Committee has oversight and authorization responsibility for roughly two thirds of the Department of Energy's annual budget. I think I speak for members on both sides of the aisle when I say that we do not take this responsibility lightly.

It is no secret that I have disagreed in the past and continue to be very concerned with the Administration's decision to embrace the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. However, I recognize that the Department right now has no choice but to pursue a science-based stockpile stewardship and management program. When I talk privately to many experts, they tell me that the science in this program is top-notch, but they also confide in me that the only certain way to assure the safety and reliability of our nuclear weapons is to test them.

According to the Department, five years from now, if all goes according to schedule, our experts will finally have the complete set of tools they say they need to confidently mitigate the loss of underground nuclear weapons testing. By that time, however, half of our entire stockpile will be beyond its design life, and we won't have tested a nuclear weapon for 12 years. This strikes me as a very high risk approach to an absolutely critical facet of our national security.

Something that also greatly concerns me along with the loss of the capability to test nuclear weapons, is the loss of scientists and technicians that have conducted underground nuclear tests. The DOE laboratories tell us that the community of scientists with actual test experience is thinning at an distressing rate. As these scientists age and leave the workforce, they cannot be replaced. Hopefully this community of test-experienced scientists will not run out before DOE has all the hardware and software in place to conduct the so-called science-based stockpile stewardship. While the extremely high-tech tools that we are procuring under the stockpile stewardship program are probably an attractive enticement for new scientific talent, it seems that our test-experienced scientists are a resource that we should attempt to preserve. The new scientists may someday

have a supercomputer that will perform 100 trillion operations per second, however I would feel better if the advanced mathematical models being performed on those computers are developed under the guidance of scientists that have actually monitored nuclear tests.

I am aware that late last year Secretary Richardson and Secretary Cohen certified that the nuclear stockpile is safe and reliable and there was not a need to resume underground nuclear testing. I welcome the Secretary's testimony on whether science-based stockpile stewardship will be able to provide confidence in the stockpile into the indefinite future, or is there an identifiable timeframe in which this approach to stockpile stewardship ought to be reassessed. I further welcome the Secretary's testimony on whether DOE has made progress in its effort to develop a clear set of identifiable criteria that would allow the Department to declare failure of the science-based program and therefore trigger a recommendation to resume underground testing. In other words, how will DOE know if, and when, the science-based approach isn't providing sufficient confidence in the safety and reliability of the stockpile?

Along with Stockpile Stewardship, a robust program of Stockpile Maintenance is critical to preserving a credible nuclear deterrence. Stockpile Maintenance involves the surveillance, normal and corrective maintenance, and refurbishment of our nuclear stockpile. The Stockpile Maintenance program is also charged with providing an adequate supply of tritium. Tritium is a radioactive isotope of hydrogen necessary for the proper functioning of our nuclear weapons. Tritium decays at a rate of about five percent a year and needs to be replenished periodically. The U.S. has not produced tritium since 1988, and a new source of tritium could, and likely will, be needed by 2005. Last December, Secretary Richardson selected a commercial light water reactor option to be the Department's primary means for future tritium production. Our second panel of witnesses will discuss that decision.

One of this Committee's priorities over the last few years has been the development of ballistic missile defense systems. The mission of these systems is very technically complex and, unfortunately, the Department of Defense and its contractors have had a difficult time meeting these technical challenges. This Subcommittee knows that the scientific capabilities of the DOE laboratories are unmatched. That is why we have sought the assistance of these laboratories in the government's ballistic missile defense efforts. I would like Secretary Richardson to address this issue in his testimony. In particular, can the Secretary make a commitment that the Department will assist DOD in this national effort?

A very large portion of the DOE budget is consumed by environmental management. The Department has begun a new effort to "privatize" some of its remediation projects. Under the concept of privatization, the contractors will build clean-up facilities using private funds. They are not paid by the government until they actually begin treating nuclear waste successfully. Since no privatization projects are yet mature enough to prove the concept, it remains to be seen whether privatization will result in clean-up of nuclear waste sites at a reduced cost to the government. I understand that the Department's FY 2000 budget contains a request for four years of advanced appropriations to the tune of \$600 million per year for the largest of these privatization programs, the Hanford Tank Waste Remediation System. I would like the Secretary to explain to us why DOE believes it is necessary to lock-in appropriations for this project for the next four years.

Finally, I would like to thank the Secretary for meeting with us a couple of weeks ago to discuss implementation of the Department's new counterintelligence program. Mr. Secretary, I think you know that this Subcommittee is very serious about maintaining information security at our national laboratories. We look forward to continue working with you as your new counterintelligence operations are established.

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