

**Statement of Thomas P. D'Agostino
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U.S. Department of Energy
on the
Current Status and Future Direction
for U.S. Nuclear Weapons Policy and Posture
Before The
Subcommittee on Strategic Forces
House Armed Services Committee**

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Chairman Turner, Ranking Member Sanchez, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify about the nuclear mission, and the work the National Nuclear Security Administration is doing to ensure the effectiveness of our nation's nuclear deterrent and to advance global nuclear security.

This is a unique opportunity to discuss the current policy context, Department of Defense requirements for our nuclear stockpile, and NNSA's modernization plans for the stockpile and our supporting infrastructure, all of which have been developed in support of the President's comprehensive nuclear security agenda.

I also want to thank the Committee for your continued support of the Department of Energy and NNSA. We have 35,000 men and women across the Nuclear Security Enterprise working to keep our country safe, protect our allies, and enhance global security; your leadership and support have made their jobs easier.

The President has made strengthening nuclear security and the nonproliferation regime one of his top priorities. Over the last few years we have worked tirelessly to establish a consensus on U.S. nuclear policy. This high level support, as laid out in the Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) and as seen in the President's effort to secure Senate approval of the new START treaty, were critical developments for NNSA, and the commitment of the White House has reinvigorated my entire organization. Furthermore, President Obama's commitment to reverse the decline in investment that took place before he entered office is essential for accomplishing the nuclear security agenda.

This commitment was reflected in the President's FY 2012 budget request for NNSA. The FY 2012 request reflects an integrated, ten year plan, and identifies the funding necessary to ensure the safety, security, and effectiveness of our nuclear stockpile, modernize the infrastructure we need to execute our mission, and revitalize the science, technology, and engineering (ST&E) base that supports the full range of our nuclear security activities. Investment in these capabilities over the next decade is essential – I cannot overemphasize this point – and will require sustained multi-year support from future Administrations and Congresses.

The NPR and New START have been important to our Enterprise for the direction they have given us. The NPR has provided a government-wide consensus on the role of nuclear weapons in our national security strategy, and provided an opportunity to make long-term decisions about comprehensive nuclear modernization in a way grounded in national policy. Furthermore, New START has strengthened our national security not just by decreasing the number of deployed nuclear weapons in the world, but also by reestablishing the transparency and verification measures that build trust and are such an integral part of a positive U.S.-Russian relationship.

The stability we have gained from the NPR and New START allows us to plan and use our resources much more effectively. It means we can make smart, strategic decisions based on clear mission guidance. We have a comprehensive Stockpile Stewardship and Management Plan that is updated annually, and provides a 20-year view of the stockpile, as well as the science, infrastructure and human capital necessary to execute complex transformation and nuclear modernization activities. This plan is produced in coordination with the 1251 report, a joint report with the Department of Defense that provides a 10 year projection for modernization plans, to include delivery systems.

I would like to express my concern, however, that this sense of stability could be eroded given the uncertainties stemming from the reductions Congress is contemplating in the FY 2012 budget process. These uncertainties directly impact our workforce, our ability to efficiently plan and execute our programs, and, ultimately, our ability to be successful. In order to plan and execute a complex and integrated program efficiently, the NNSA had developed and received support for the 10-year plan outlined in the 1251 Report; however, this consensus for nuclear modernization is facing great uncertainty in the face of today's extreme fiscal challenges and the limitations imposed by the Congress in the Budget Control Act. It is critical to accept the linkage between modernizing our current stockpile in order to achieve the policy objective of decreasing the number of weapons we have in our stockpile, while still ensuring our deterrent is safe, secure and effective.

Our Stockpile Stewardship Program, which allows us to assess and certify the nuclear stockpile without returning to underground nuclear testing, has grown increasingly important. The science, technology, and engineering base at our national laboratories is the backbone of the nuclear security mission. Our world-class scientific capabilities, for example in modeling, simulation and supercomputing, continue to be developed to realize the SSP and today we have a greater understanding of how a nuclear weapon behaves than we did during the days of testing.

The ability of our Nuclear Security Enterprise to assess the stockpile is the primary mission of the Stockpile Stewardship Program. Surveillance is a critical component of this mission. We are working every day to improve our ability to identify, understand, and address the effects of aging of our stockpile. We are moving forward with key life extension programs, and are working to design and build the modern facilities we need to maintain the nation's expertise in uranium component processing and plutonium research. And most importantly, we are working to recruit and retain the next generation of scientists and engineers.

The types of people we need to execute our mission are highly sought-after. Without a long-term vision that is consistently supported by the Congress, they can, and will, simply look elsewhere.

We have some of the best and brightest engineers and scientists in the world but to retain this workforce we must give them the tools and facilities they need to be innovative and effective, as well as an atmosphere where they can work with a sense of national purpose and clarity.

I would like to emphasize that this workforce supports the breadth of the NNSA mission space. Investing in a modern Nuclear Security Enterprise is not just about the stockpile. As the President said in Prague in April 2009, the threat of a terrorist acquiring and using a nuclear weapon is the most immediate and extreme threat we face. The investments we make today help support the full range of our nuclear security mission, which includes countering nuclear terrorism. Moreover, these investments are necessary for maintaining the high quality workforce that is critical for us to be successful.

NNSA engineers are working to complete the design work on the nuclear reactor plant for the Ohio-class Replacement submarine. This effort is a continuation of the long standing unique role NNSA serves in partnership with the U.S. Navy.

We have some of the best minds in the country working on issues like nuclear forensics, treaty verification activities, scientist engagements, and research and development initiatives that ultimately help keep nuclear material and expertise out of the hands of terrorists. We also carry this engagement to our international partners, who are an indispensable part of our nonproliferation effort.

As part of our nonproliferation work, we are developing advanced safeguards, technologies, and concepts to support the IAEA and are assisting many Member States around the world in implementing their Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty obligations. As part of our strategic arms control verification work, we are leveraging the expertise of our physicists and engineers to advance radiation detection technology and equipment. And should new monitoring capabilities be required, specialists from throughout our Enterprise will play an essential role in the development and evaluation process.

We are leading international efforts to implement more stringent standards for the physical protection of nuclear material and nuclear facilities worldwide. And as part of our ongoing efforts to permanently eliminate materials that could be used by terrorists to make a nuclear weapon we recently downblended over 72 pounds of highly enriched uranium in Kazakhstan. This effort was an important milestone, bringing us closer to achieving President Obama's goal of securing all vulnerable nuclear material around the world. In addition, we recently reached a major achievement by equipping all Russian border crossing points with over 380 radiation detection monitors to help deter and detect illicit trafficking of nuclear and other radioactive materials across international borders. This was the culmination of 15 years of cooperative efforts with Russia.

We are working toward a modern, 21st Century Nuclear Security Enterprise that is safer, more secure, more efficient, and organized to succeed. Our goal is for a truly integrated Enterprise where all of our programs and partners work together to fulfill our continuing missions. With clear direction from the President, and with Congress's support, I believe the Enterprise can move steadily on the path toward future mission success.

I look forward to answering any questions you may have and appreciate the invitation to be here today.