



PRESS RELEASES OF SENATOR PETE DOMENICI

Domenici Supports 12 Percent Increase for Nuclear Energy, Disputes Fusion Research Shift

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WASHINGTON – U.S. Senator Pete Domenici today voiced his support for a 12 percent increase in federal funding for nuclear energy research, but challenged the Energy Department to be more proactive in following congressional intent in promoting the next generation of modern nuclear power plants.

Domenici is chairman of the Energy and Water Development Appropriations Subcommittee that today received testimony on the FY2006 budget requests for Department of Energy's Office of Science, Office of Nuclear Energy, and Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy (EERE).

Overall, the budget recommends \$510 million for the Office of Nuclear Energy, up \$25 million or 5 percent from FY2005. Of this, \$191 million—a 12 percent increase—is requested for nuclear energy research and development. (For New Mexico, the nuclear energy budget recommends \$10 million for work at Los Alamos National Laboratory and \$4 million for Sandia National Laboratories.)

"Our nuclear future cannot end with the existing plants now in operation," Domenici said. "We must continue to support new reactors that are more efficient, produce less waste and don't pose a proliferation threat. I am pleased with the administration's budget request, but certainly think DOE must aggressively pursue projects, like the Next Generation Nuclear Plant."

Domenici was critical of the administration's lack of support in the FY2006 budget for the Next Generation Nuclear Plant (NGNP), and the lack of action on releasing the \$25 million Congress appropriated for the project last year. DOE has yet to also provide a required report on a schedule and plan for developing the NGNP at the Idaho National Laboratory.

Domenici said it is unacceptable that DOE has yet to award any matching funds under the Nuclear Power 2010 program despite positive response from the nuclear power industry. In return for federal matching funds and cost-share incentives associated with first-of-the-kind engineering of a new plant, the industry has responded with:

- * three utilities having applied for early site permits;
- * three more are in the exploration phase; and,
- * two consortia have applied for DOE funding to support construction and operating licenses for new plants before the RNC.

"While I am pleased with utility interest in these programs, I am frustrated with DOE. Since Congress passed the budget last November, DOE has designated two groups for award. But four months later, the Office of Nuclear Energy has yet to send out a single dollar to either party. These delays are unacceptable," Domenici said.

Domenici did, however, say he was heartened by the fact that the budget seeks \$56 million for Nuclear Power 2010, an increase of \$6 million or 12.9 percent over FY2005.

Domenici said he is also greatly concerned about a budgetary shift on U.S. fusion research to the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER), particularly since there is not international agreement on citing this facility. The budget proposes a \$46 million U.S. contribution to ITER, the first installment on a \$1 billion commitment.

"This subcommittee has been very clear about its opposition to funding ITER out of the fusion account. If we are to remain at the cutting edge of fusion research, we cannot undermine our own scientific excellence by under-funding our own capability," Domenici said.

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