

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 27, 2020

The Honorable Gene Dodaro
Comptroller General of the United States
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro,

We write to request that the Government Accountability Office (GAO) conduct an assessment of the affordability of the National Nuclear Security Administration's (NNSA) nuclear modernization programs. The GAO raised concerns in a 2017 report about the affordability of NNSA modernization efforts, and NNSA's budget and activities have expanded significantly since that time.

GAO's 2017 report characterized NNSA's efforts at the time as "ambitious" and "costly," and stated that "[t]he next decade represents a particularly challenging period for NNSA's modernization efforts."¹ GAO recommended that NNSA assess the affordability of its modernization programs, including by "presenting options NNSA could consider to bring its estimates of modernization funding needs into alignment with potential future budgets, such as potentially deferring the start of or cancelling specific modernization programs."²

Questions about affordability are critical given the significant expansion in NNSA's budget and activities. For example, the President's FY2021 budget requested a 25.2% increase for Weapons Activities, and further budgetary expansion is possible should the President allow the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) to expire next February.

Accordingly, we respectfully request that GAO conduct an analysis of the NNSA budget that addresses the following:

- 1) Is the "Affordability Analysis" section of the Stockpile Stewardship and Management Plan for FY2020³ sufficient to "help NNSA put forth more credible modernization plans," as recommended by GAO's 2017 report?

¹ U.S. Government Accountability Office, *National Nuclear Security Administration: Action Needed to Address Affordability of Nuclear Modernization Programs* (April 2017), p. 40, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-17-341.pdf>.

² U.S. Government Accountability Office, *National Nuclear Security Administration: Action Needed to Address Affordability of Nuclear Modernization Programs* (April 2017), p. 40, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-17-341.pdf>.

³ National Nuclear Security Administration, U.S. Department of Energy, *Fiscal Year 2020 Stockpile Stewardship and Management Plan: Report to Congress* (July 2019), p. 8-47, https://www.energy.gov/sites/prod/files/2019/08/f65/FY2020_SSMP.pdf.

- 2) Does the “Affordability Analysis” section of the Stockpile Stewardship and Management Plan for FY2020 indicate that NNSA has prioritized certain modernization programs? Has NNSA considered deferring or cancelling specific modernization programs, per GAO’s 2017 recommendation?⁴
- 3) Please compare NNSA’s major modernization activities as they appear in the President’s FY2021 budget to the major modernization activities (and associated costs) that NNSA was implementing prior to the release of the 2018 Nuclear Posture Review.
- 4) The NNSA Weapons Activities budget request for FY2021 is \$15,602,000,000 and the projected FY2021 budget request in the FY2020 Future-Years Nuclear Security Program (FYNSP) was \$12,793,804,000. What accounts for the disparity?
- 5) Which programs in NNSA, other areas of the Department of Energy, or other U.S. Government agencies will receive less funding to compensate for Weapons Activities budget increases?
- 6) How would the potential expiration of New START in February 2021 affect the assumptions in the FY2021 budget estimate regarding future-years funding?

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

Dianne Feinstein
Ranking Member
Energy and Water Development Appropriations
Subcommittee

⁴ U.S. Government Accountability Office, *National Nuclear Security Administration: Action Needed to Address Affordability of Nuclear Modernization Programs* (April 2017), p. 39, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-17-341.pdf>.