"If nuclear security expertise is limited to a small pool of staff, preserving institutional knowledge in a frequently changing Congress becomes a serious challenge," the report states, adding that this may have contributed to the conditions the study sought to address.

Even though only two nuclear reactors are under construction in the United States, there are 50 new plants being built around the world and 20 countries without nuclear programs that have expressed interest in starting them, presenting the potential for nuclear proliferation and security issues. Meanwhile, in 2014, Russia ceased most nuclear security cooperation with the United States. Also, according to the report, budgets for nuclear oversight continue to decline.

Results of the study indicate that although congressional staff surveyed are generally aware of the need to improve global nuclear security, they expressed no clear strategic direction through which to advance these claims. Still, the report notes, despite most congressional staff self-assessments indicating that their familiarity with nuclear security issues is lacking, there are some programs that are in place and further actions that can be taken to improve the situation.

First, the report states, there is a long legacy of bipartisan congressional action toward reducing nuclear risks, with perhaps the best example being the Nunn-Lugar Amendment in 1991, which sought to protect the world from nuclear weapons upon the collapse of the Soviet Union. It also provided assistance to former Soviet nuclear scientists and technicians to support peaceful scientific work and prevent their nuclear knowledge from being shared with other states. This assistance was later expanded to include nuclear, chemical, and biological materials around the world.

Citing examples of these successful bipartisan efforts could spark interest among young staffers, according to the report. Holding more congressional hearings on nuclear security could also help rekindle interest, as could the addition of more Executive Branch briefings on the subject, the report states. In addition, educational efforts to improve Congress's management of nuclear security need to include both energy and foreign policy staffers so that knowledge of nuclear materials and international security can be shared. The authors of the report also advocate for expanding the National Nuclear Security Administration's budget for security and nonproliferation research. The creation of a congressional commission to develop, by 2020, a comprehensive list of strategies to prevent, counter, and respond to nuclear and radiological terrorism is also strongly recommended in the report.

"Clearly, nuclear security does not have the understanding, attention, and priority in the Congress that its national security implications require," the report states.

The full report can be downloaded at <www.armscontrol.org/reports/2018/empowering-congress-nuclear-security-blueprints-new-generation>.

NNSA

OST graduates largest class of agents since 2010

At a graduation ceremony held on July 17 at Fort Chaffee, in western Arkansas, the Office of Secure Transportation (OST) at the Department of Energy's National Nuclear Security Administration recognized 24 federal agents who had successfully completed Nuclear Materials Courier training. OST is responsible for the safe and secure transport of government-owned special nuclear materials in the contiguous United States.

"These candidates put in a lot of hard work and are now members of one of the most elite security forces in the federal government," said Vincent Fisher, the NNSA's assistant deputy administrator for secure transportation. "OST has an