

puts about \$2 billion back into the Army Corps of Engineers' budget and increases defense spending by about \$1 billion. That money, he said, will have to come out of other DOE programs, including a reduction in funding for the Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy (EERE)

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initiative and the elimination of the Advanced Research Projects Agency–Energy (ARPA-E) program. Simpson said that reducing the EERE budget was not something that he wanted to do, but he agreed with the elimination of ARPA-E, saying that it will allow the DOE to refocus on basic research.

The main challenges the EM program faces, Simpson said, are the same ones it has faced for the last five or more years—namely, what to do about the Mixed Oxide (MOX) Fuel Fabrication Facility (MFFF) at the Savannah River Site and how to move forward on the Yucca Mountain repository project and the consolidated interim

storage of spent nuclear fuel. Simpson said that he has met with Sen. Lamar Alexander (R., Tenn.) and Secretary Perry to discuss these projects but they were unable to reach any agreements.

Regarding the MFFF, which is intended to convert surplus weapons-grade plutonium into nuclear fuel for commercial use, Simpson said that the DOE's current plan of abandoning the project for a "dilute and dispose" option raises a lot of unanswered questions. He said that it

is still not known what the full costs of disposal would be, or whether the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) would need to be expanded to accommodate the plutonium, or if Russia, which was part of the MOX agreement, would accept the disposal alternative.

Simpson said he doesn't want a future chairman of the Energy and Water Subcommittee to be held hostage to a decision made today with incomplete information and without a clear path forward. He added that abandoning the MFFF would be walking away from a lot of money. According to the DOE's most recent performance baseline, over \$4.6 billion has

already been spent on constructing the MFFF. That baseline also puts the estimated total project cost at between \$9.9 billion and \$17 billion.

As for Yucca Mountain and the possibility of a national interim storage program, Simpson said that following the election, he and other lawmakers were confident that a resolution would be found. "But now we are back to the same situation," he said. Simpson explained that it will be difficult to get anything done, because Republicans in the Senate hold only a two-seat majority, one of which is occupied by Sen. Dean Heller (R., Nev.), who is opposed to the Yucca Mountain Project. Simpson said that he wasn't sure if Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R., Ky.) will be willing to risk Heller's support by pursuing Yucca Mountain.

The Senate and the House have long been at loggerheads regarding Yucca Mountain and consolidated interim storage, with the House wanting to make any interim storage program contingent on moving Yucca Mountain forward, while the Senate has been willing to decouple the two programs. Simpson said that if the Senate does not approve any money for Yucca Mountain, it is certain that the House will not pass an interim storage bill.

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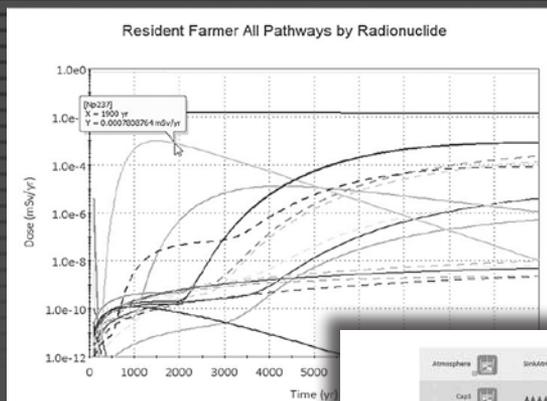
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