Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

December 16, 2025

The Honorable Chris Wright
Secretary of Energy
U.S. Department of Energy
1000 Independence Ave, SW
Washington, DC 20585

Dear Secretary Wright,

We write with concerns regarding the National Nuclear Security Administration's (NNSA) effort to reestablish plutonium pit production for use in U.S. nuclear weapons. In August, the Department of Energy (DOE) issued a memorandum launching a special study into NNSA's "leadership and management of the plutonium pit production mission."[1] If properly conducted, this study should find that years of mismanagement have put billions of taxpayer dollars at risk with an unrealistic pit production schedule and goals. Simultaneously, NNSA is waiting for a pit aging study by JASON that may call into question the wisdom of the current pit production program. We urge you to seriously review the need for and scope of the program, as well as pause planned production at the secondary Savannah River site until NNSA has established basic programmatic guardrails to prevent additional waste.

New Pit Program is Unnecessary & Unrealistic

It is unclear whether new pit production at the rates that NNSA and DoD have specified is needed to maintain the U.S. nuclear stockpile within the next few decades. NNSA has failed to provide a public report with evidence justifying the size and scope of the current pit production program it is undertaking.[2] A recent report by the Union of Concerned Scientists found that there was "no clear anchor in established military or technical need" guiding the 80 pit-per-year pit production requirement.[3]

The public justification for the effort "often emphasize[s] a need to replace aging pits,"[4] but reports show pit aging is an uncertain rationale. Scientists have "identified concerns that radioactive decay of plutonium in a pit, called aging, over many years may degrade a weapon's

[1] Memorandum from Deputy Secretary of Energy James Danly to Office of Enterprise Assessments Director John Dupuy, August 11, 2025, https://lasg.org/MPF2/documents/DOE-SpecialStudyNNSALeadershipMgmtPPPMission_ltr_11Aug2025.pdf.
[2] Union of Concerned Scientists, "Plutonium Pit Production: The Risks and Costs of US Plans to Build New Nuclear Weapons," Dylan K. Spaulding, May 2025, p. 80, https://www.ucs.org/sites/default/files/2025-06/Plutonium-Pit-Report-060225-FINAL.pdf.
[3] *Id.*, pp. 2 & 36.
[4] *Id.*, p. 2.

performance."[5] Since the 1990s, NNSA has conducted studies and modeling to assess pit aging,[6] and NNSA laboratories reported in 2006 that "there was no degradation in primary performance for weapon systems due to plutonium aging that would be cause for near-term concern regarding their safety and reliability."[7] JASON, an independent scientific advisory group to the U.S. government,[8] found that the 2006 study used a reliable framework.[9] JASON was able to determine from the study that most primary pits, which were largely produced in the 1980s,[10] "have credible minimum lifetimes in excess of 100 years," and those with fewer years have mitigating measures that can be utilized.[11] In a follow-up review in 2019, JASON recommended some level of new pit production but found that "NNSA was not sufficiently prioritizing plutonium and pit aging research,"[12] and Congress required NNSA to begin 10 years of experiments, modeling, and simulations to provide an updated picture of the effects of pit aging.[13] The endeavor started in fiscal year 2021 and is set to cost $1 billion[14] – it is also already delayed with the construction of the experimental facilities underground costing an additional more than $2.23 billion, called Zeus and Scorpius, slipping by 3 and 4 years to 2030 and 2033, respectively.[15] The results of the research would "allow NNSA to more confidently predict pit lifetimes for each nuclear weapon system," helping to determine which systems, if any, need new pits.[16] Even though the research will not conclude until fiscal year 2030, NNSA is still moving forward with producing new pits.[17]

[5] U.S. Government Accountability Office, "Nuclear Weapons: Information on the National Nuclear Security Administration's Research Plan for Plutonium and Pit Aging," p. 2, https://www.gao.gov/assets/d24106740.pdf.
[6] *Id*.
[7] *Id.*
[8] Federation of American Scientists, "JASON Defense Advisory Panel Reports," February 3, 2022, https://irp.fas.org/agency/dod/jason.
[9] U.S. Government Accountability Office, "Nuclear Weapons: Information on the National Nuclear Security Administration's Research Plan for Plutonium and Pit Aging," p. 2, https://www.gao.gov/assets/d24106740.pdf.
[10] Los Alamos National Laboratory, "Pit production explained," December 13, 2021, https://www.lanl.gov/media/publications/national-security-science/1221-pit-production-explained.
[11] JASON Study Group, "Pit Lifetime," R. J. Hemley, D Meiron, L. Bildsten, et. al, January 2007, p. 1, https://irp.fas.org/agency/dod/jason/pit.pdf.
[12] U.S. Government Accountability Office, "Nuclear Weapons: Information on the National Nuclear Security Administration's Research Plan for Plutonium and Pit Aging," p. 2, https://www.gao.gov/assets/d24106740.pdf.
[13] *Id.*, p. 4.
[14] *Id.*, p. 4.
[15] U.S. Department of Energy, "FY 2026 Congressional Justification: National Nuclear Security Administration," May 2025, pp. 351 & 366, https://www.energy.gov/sites/default/files/2025-06/doe-fy-2026-vol-1.pdf. Zeus and Scorpius fall under the Advanced Sources and Detectors line, costing $2,228,363; U.S. Government Accountability Office, "Nuclear Weapons: Program Management Improvements Would Benefit U.S. Efforts to Build New Experimental Capabilities," August 2023, pp. 7 & 8, https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-23-105714.pdf.
[16] U.S. Government Accountability Office, "Nuclear Weapons: Information on the National Nuclear Security Administration's Research Plan for Plutonium and Pit Aging," press release, February 29, 2024, https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-24-106740.
[17] U.S. Government Accountability Office, "Nuclear Weapons: Information on the National Nuclear Security Administration's Research Plan for Plutonium and Pit Aging," February 29, 2024, p. 4, https://www.gao.gov/assets/d24106740.pdf.

The stated goal of NNSA is to produce "no fewer than 80 pits per year, as close to [the year] 2030 as possible."[18] Although this requirement was established in U.S. Code,[19] a 2019 assessment by the Institute for Defense Analyses found that the goal was not possible "on the schedules or budgets currently forecasted."[20] In June 2021, the then-acting NNSA Administrator testified that meeting the required production levels "would take 2 to 5 years longer than NNSA originally planned (2032-2035)."[21] The following year, the commander of U.S. Strategic Command testified that the 2030 timeline would not be met, "and that no amount of funding would allow NNSA to recover enough time to do so."[22] In 2023, the then-NNSA Administrator confirmed that the agency would not meet the set timeline.[23]

Despite skepticism from NNSA and DoD personnel on the feasibility of the current pit production plan, you have thrown your support behind the unrealistic goal. In an interview, you claimed that while the United States has only "built one [pit] in the last 25 years," you plan to "build more than 100 during the Trump administration."[24] Los Alamos is the only current facility that can produce pits, and the site "diamond-stamped" its first plutonium pit of the modernization effort last year, but it has given no indication when subsequent pits will be produced.[25] Without a significant turnaround at NNSA, there seems to be a long road before the United States can make 100 pits that are certified for the national stockpile.

Pit Production Mismanagement

Building the capacity to produce plutonium pits "likely represents NNSA's largest investment in weapons production infrastructure to date," and NNSA has not conducted the intense planning required to get the job done.[26] In an August memorandum, your Deputy Secretary of Energy recognized there were "challenges impeding progress" towards pit production at NNSA and called for a study into, in part, the agency's leadership and management processes.[27] This study

[18] Los Alamos Study Group, "Pit Production Contingency Plans," October 2021, https://lasg.org/MPF2/documents/NNSA-Report-Pit-Production-Contingency-Plans_Oct2021.pdf; National Nuclear Security Administration, "Plutonium Pit Production," https://www.energy.gov/nnsa/plutonium-pit-production.
[19] 50 U.S.C. § 2538a.
[20] Institute for Defense Analyses, "Independent Assessment of the Two-Site Pit Production Decision: Executive Summary," May 2019, p. 4, https://www.ida.org/-/media/feature/publications/i/in/independent-assessment-of-the-two-site-pit-production-decision-executive-summary/d-10711.ashx.
[21] U.S. Government Accountability Office, "Nuclear Weapons: NNSA Does Not Have a Comprehensive Schedule or Cost Estimate for Pit Production Capability," January 2023, p. 3, https://www.gao.gov/assets/d23104661.pdf.
[22] *Id*.
[23] Written testimony of Under Secretary for Nuclear Security and Administrator Jill Hruby to the House Armed Services Committee's Subcommittee on Strategic Forces, March 28, 2023, p. 7, https://docs.house.gov/meetings/AS/AS29/20230328/115619/HHRG-118-AS29-Bio-HrubyJ-20230328.pdf.
[24] Fox News, "Energy chief envisions US nuclear renaissance: restoring 'pit' production, localizing nuke power," Charles Creitz, March 30, 2025, https://www.foxnews.com/politics/energy-chief-envisions-us-nuclear-renaissance-restoring-pit-production-localizing-nuke-power.
[25] Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, "The Energy Department just made one plutonium pit. Making more is uncertain," Dylan Spaulding, October 10, 2024, https://thebulletin.org/2024/10/the-energy-department-just-made-one-plutonium-pit-making-more-is-uncertain.
[26] U.S. Government Accountability Office, "Nuclear Weapons: NNSA Does Not Have a Comprehensive Schedule or Cost Estimate for Pit Production Capability," January 2023, https://www.gao.gov/assets/d23104661.pdf.
[27] Memorandum from Deputy Secretary of Energy James Danly to Office of Enterprise Assessments Director John Dupuy, August 11, 2025, https://lasg.org/MPF2/documents/DOE-

is a step in the right direction and should build on the letter the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) sent to you earlier this year, highlighting its recommendations for improving high-risk operations at NNSA, including the management of pit production.[28] GAO's "several priority recommendations" seek to provide NNSA with "a more structured and defensible approach to managing the billions of dollars of work in its Weapons Activities portfolio,"[29] and DOE's study should ensure the program weaknesses GAO's recommendations address are thoroughly evaluated.

We are concerned that, years into this program, we still do not know what the pit production program's full cost will be. GAO has identified at least $33 billion and as much as $43 billion in current and future budget requests for pit production, though that is likely still an incomplete picture of the true cost of the program.[30] NNSA's inability to develop a comprehensive life cycle cost estimate to determine the true cost is a major weakness, and we remain concerned that NNSA will not be able to have a life cycle cost estimate until 2026.[31] Establishing a cost estimate "can enhance decision-making, especially in early planning stages, as well as support budget… and investment decisions."[32] NNSA officials claim that their "information is too immature to put together a life cycle cost estimate,"[33] but according to GAO's best practices, "one should use the best information available, clearly identify the confidence level in the estimate, and add detail as more is learned."[34] NNSA also regularly produces estimates for other major programs, such as the W87-1 warhead program.[35] NNSA has already spent more than $5 billion on pit production activities, and Congress continues to receive budget requests for the effort that grow larger each year, without a comprehensive estimate on how high the bill will grow.[36]

NNSA's lack of communication with Congress on costly projects compounds our concern about the costs associated with pit production. In September, GAO released its review of NNSA's compliance with a 2011 law requiring the nuclear agency to report on cost growth for certain construction projects and nuclear weapons acquisition programs that exceed cost thresholds relative to their baselines.[37] The review found NNSA has not implemented the necessary

SpecialStudyNNSALeadershipMgmtPPPMission_ltr_11Aug2025.pdf.

[28] Letter from Comptroller General Gene L. Dodaro to Secretary of Energy Chris Wright, April 11, 2025, pp. 8-10, https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-25-108093.pdf.

[29] *Id.*, p. 1.

[30] U.S. Department of Energy, "FY 2025 Congressional Justification: National Nuclear Security Administration," March 2024, https://www.energy.gov/sites/default/files/2024-03/doe-fy-2025-budget-vol-1-v4.pdf; U.S. Government Accountability Office analysis of the fiscal year 2025 budget [on file with the Office of Senator Elizabeth Warren].

[31] U.S. Government Accountability Office, "Nuclear Weapons: NNSA Does Not Have a Comprehensive Schedule or Cost Estimate for Pit Production Capability," January 2023, recommendations for executive action, https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-23-104661.

[32] U.S. Government Accountability Office, "Nuclear Weapons: NNSA Does Not Have a Comprehensive Schedule or Cost Estimate for Pit Production Capability," press release, January 2023, https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-23-104661.

[33] U.S. Government Accountability Office, "Nuclear Weapons: NNSA Does Not Have a Comprehensive Schedule or Cost Estimate for Pit Production Capability," January 2023, p. 53, https://www.gao.gov/assets/d23104661.pdf.

[34] *Id.*, p. 58.

[35] *Id.*, p. 53.

[36] *Id.*, p. 12.

[37] U.S. Government Accountability Office, "National Nuclear Security Administration: Agency Should Improve Cost Growth Notification Process," September 30, 2025, https://www.gao.gov/assets/890/881994.pdf.

procedures to consistently comply with the notification requirement, resulting in just two notifications for seven projects that were experiencing reportable cost growth.[38] NNSA is also required to submit a root cause assessment of the cost overrun that prompted the notification.[39] Of the seven reportable projects GAO reviewed, NNSA only submitted two root cause assessments to Congress.[40] Without these assessments, it is hard for Congress to understand the real drivers behind the rising costs of several of NNSA's programs. Congress has instead relied on NNSA budget justifications and independent reviews of the pit production program to shine a light on the root causes of the pit program's ever-higher costs.

The Savannah River pit plant site is a big driver of the ballooning cost of the pit production program, even as the site's benefits remain questionable. In 2018, NNSA decided to convert the Mixed Oxide Fuel Fabrication Facility at Savannah River into a second pit production facility.[41] In the same year, "NNSA estimated the conversion cost at $1.8 to $4.6 billion."[42] However, NNSA requested over $1.9 billion to fund just the plutonium modernization efforts at Savannah River in fiscal year 2025 alone.[43] Now, the overall cost estimate has risen more than five times the original amount to a high of $25 billion.[44]

The Savannah River site was chosen as a second site to provide "resiliency, flexibility, and redundancy" to the pit program.[45] However, "the complex remains dependent on numerous… single points of failure,"[46] preventing it from being resilient, and both Savannah River and Los Alamos will rely on some of the same technology and equipment, resources, and talent, preventing them from being flexible.[47] While the hope is that Savannah River might provide redundancy, "almost none of the rest of the US nuclear enterprise has redundant capabilities"

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[38] *Id.*, pp. 1 & 9.
[39] *Id.*, pp. 11 & 12.
[40] *Id.*, pp. 11 & 12.
[41] U.S. Department of Energy, "Joint Statement from Ellen M. Lord and Lisa E. Gordon-Hagerty on Recapitalization of Plutonium Pit Production," May 10, 2018, https://www.energy.gov/nnsa/articles/joint-statement-ellen-m-lord-and-lisa-e-gordon-hagerty-recapitalization-plutonium-pit; Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, "Why a decision on a second US plutonium-pit-production factory should be delayed," Frank von Hippel, June 12, 2020, https://thebulletin.org/2020/06/why-a-decision-on-a-second-us-plutonium-pit-production-factory-should-be-delayed.
[42] Union of Concerned Scientists, "Plutonium Pit Production: The Risks and Costs of US Plans to Build New Nuclear Weapons," Dylan K. Spaulding, May 2025, p. xiii, https://www.ucs.org/sites/default/files/2025-06/Plutonium-Pit-Report-060225-FINAL.pdf.
[43] U.S. Department of Energy, "FY 2025 Congressional Justification, Laboratory Tables," May 2025, p. 107, https://www.energy.gov/sites/default/files/2024-03/doe-fy-2025-budget-vol-1-v3.pdf. NNSA requested 1,927,906,00 for "Savannah River Plutonium Modernization" in its fiscal year 2026 budget request and the program is expected to run through 2035.
[44] U.S. Department of Energy, "FY 2026 Congressional Justification: National Nuclear Security Administration," May 2025, p. 199, https://www.energy.gov/sites/default/files/2025-06/doe-fy-2026-vol-1.pdf; Union of Concerned Scientists, "Plutonium Pit Production: The Risks and Costs of US Plans to Build New Nuclear Weapons," Dylan K. Spaulding, May 2025, p. xiii, https://www.ucs.org/sites/default/files/2025-06/Plutonium-Pit-Report-060225-FINAL.pdf.
[45] Union of Concerned Scientists, "Plutonium Pit Production: The Risks and Costs of US Plans to Build New Nuclear Weapons," Dylan K. Spaulding, May 2025, p. 20, https://www.ucs.org/sites/default/files/2025-06/Plutonium-Pit-Report-060225-FINAL.pdf.
[46] *Id.*, p. 22.
[47] *Id.*, p. 20.

because the "degree of specialization required for many of these components precludes complete redundancy," making even that benefit a stretch to fully realize.[48]

We are also concerned that NNSA has failed to create an integrated master schedule for the pit production program. A proper master schedule helps coordinate a program and mitigate missing or incomplete activities.[49] As of GAO's 2023 report, NNSA's schedule only included some activities at some sites through the production of its first pit in 2024[50] and did not assign resources to the activities listed, which inhibits NNSA's ability to inform its annual budget request and allocate the budget it is given.[51] To date, GAO's recommendation for NNSA to have an integrated master schedule consistent with best practices remains open.[52] As the GAO has pointed out, without having a schedule, NNSA is "increasing the likelihood of disruption and delay" for the program.[53] The lack of a schedule also inhibits Congress's ability to provide responsible appropriations and policy on the program because it does not have an end date for when pit production startup activities will be complete.

The current pit production effort is meant to support weapons programs that are themselves behind schedule, and near-term programs, like the W87-1 and W93, may not need 80 pits produced per year to be fielded, making the need for a master schedule even more pressing. For example, NNSA plans to support the Sentinel intercontinental ballistic missile program with W87-1 warheads using new pits, but a delay of "several years is currently estimated" for the Sentinel program and the program does not currently have an official schedule for when it will be deployed.[54] The Air Force is reportedly looking at options to potentially operate Minuteman III, Sentinel's predecessor, through 2050.[55] With Sentinel's delays, GAO reported that the "Air Force must operate the aging Minuteman III longer than planned—potentially significantly longer," and, still, the "Air Force assessed that prolonged operation of Minuteman III is possible."[56] A former acting NNSA Administrator noted that W87-0 warheads, existing pits that are used for Minuteman III, can be "qualified and deployed" onto Sentinel missiles, carving out an alternative warhead to a new W87-1.[57] The head of the U.S. Strategic Command also stated

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[48] *Id.*, p. 22.
[49] U.S. Government Accountability Office, "Nuclear Weapons: NNSA Does Not Have a Comprehensive Schedule or Cost Estimate for Pit Production Capability," January 2023, Highlights, https://www.gao.gov/assets/d23104661.pdf.
[50] *Id.*, p. 40.
[51] *Id.*, p. 51.
[52] U.S. Government Accountability Office, "Nuclear Weapons: NNSA Does Not Have a Comprehensive Schedule or Cost Estimate for Pit Production Capability," press release, January 12, 2023, https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-23-104661.
[53] U.S. Government Accountability Office, "Nuclear Weapons: NNSA Does Not Have a Comprehensive Schedule or Cost Estimate for Pit Production Capability," January 2023, Highlights, https://www.gao.gov/assets/d23104661.pdf.
[54] U.S. Department of Defense, "Department of Defense Announces Results of Sentinel Nunn-McCurdy Review," July 8, 2024, https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3829985; *See*: Breaking Defense, "Air Force general pledges to 'get Sentinel done,' expects Milestone B in 2027," Michael Marrow, September 23, 2025, https://breakingdefense.com/2025/09/air-force-general-pledges-to-get-sentinel-done-expects-milestone-b-in-2027.
[55] U.S. Government Accountability Office, "ICBM MODERNIZATION: Air Force Actions Needed to Expeditiously Address Critical Risks to Sentinel Transition," September 2025, Highlights, https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-25-108466.pdf.
[56] *Id.*, p. 22.

that NNSA's plans for Los Alamos National Laboratory can meet current pit production needs for the Sentinel program on its own.[58]

In addition to the W87-1, NNSA is also set to make new pits for the W93 warhead.[59] The program is expected to first arm submarine-launched ballistic missiles, but the Los Alamos National Laboratory stated that the arming will "likely [be] starting in the mid-2030s."[60] Additionally, the then-NNSA Administrator testified in 2024 to the Senate Armed Services Committee that the agency was only planning on "targeting at least half of [W93 warhead] population" for new pits.[61] NNSA plans to fill out the other half by reusing existing pits, which reduces pressure to produce a high number of new pits quickly.[62] The timing and projected need for programs like the W87-1 and W93 make the extraordinarily costly rush to build pit production capability at the Savannah River site unnecessary.[63]

Without a comprehensive plan for this massive undertaking, the agency is setting itself up for failure. Rather than pouring money into a poorly conceived program, the United States would be better served by significantly curtailing pit production plans, pausing the Savannah River site, and developing a less risky, more sustainable approach to maintaining the U.S. nuclear stockpile. There are other high-priority tasks that NNSA must also complete, and overstating the importance of redundant pit production capability is unhelpful to setting clear priorities.

Future of Pit Production

Congress has made clear, across Republican and Democratic administrations, that its patience with NNSA's budget and schedule mismanagement is running out. The House's fiscal year 2026 appropriations report states that NNSA's "[p]rogram and project management efforts must be improved to prevent further schedule delays and cost increases, particularly on major construction projects."[64] The Senate's fiscal year 2025 Energy and Water Development

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[57] Congressional Research Service, "U.S. Strategic Nuclear Forces: Background, Developments, and Issues," Amy F. Wolf, December 14, 2021, p. 24, https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/RL/RL33640/69.

[58] Los Alamos Study Group, "Thirty pits a year in 2028 at Los Alamos meets STRATCOM needs, commander says," Dan Leone, February 2, 2024, https://www.lasg.org/press/2024/ExchangeMonitor_2Feb2024.html.

[59] U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee, "Hearing: To receive testimony on the Department of Energy and National Nuclear Security Administration atomic energy defense activities in review of the defense authorization request for fiscal year 2025 and the future years defense program," transcript, April 17, 2024, pp. 10 & 79, https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/41724fulltranscript.pdf.

[60] Los Alamos National Laboratory, "Full ahead for the W93," Whitney Spivey, June 5, 2025, https://www.lanl.gov/media/publications/national-security-science/full-ahead-for-the-w93.

[61] U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee, "Hearing: To receive testimony on the Department of Energy and National Nuclear Security Administration atomic energy defense activities in review of the defense authorization request for fiscal year 2025 and the future years defense program," transcript, April 17, 2024, p. 57, https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/41724fulltranscript.pdf

[62] *Id.*, p. 58. Then-NNSA Administrator Hruby testified that "it is important that we have a fair number of those new pits, because our option is to reuse pits," indicating any remaining need for pits would be filled by existing pits.

[63] Los Alamos Study Group, "Thirty pits a year in 2028 at Los Alamos meets STRATCOM needs, commander says," Dan Leone, February 2, 2024, https://www.lasg.org/press/2024/ExchangeMonitor_2Feb2024.html; U.S. Department of Energy, "FY 2025 Congressional Justification National Nuclear Security Administration," Volume 1, March 2024, p. 271, https://www.energy.gov/sites/default/files/2024-03/doe-fy-2025-budget-vol-1-v4.pdf.

[64] U.S. House of Representatives Report 119-213, "Energy and Water Development and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, 2026," July 21, 2025, https://www.congress.gov/committee-report/119th-congress/house-

Appropriations bill report requests NNSA to implement GAO's recommendations so that it can "properly estimate costs and timelines for large projects" because "too often NNSA has over-promised, over-spent, and under-delivered on its important commitments."[65] Lastly, GAO's April letter on high-priority recommendations notes that the fiscal year 2024 NDAA requires NNSA to ensure the pit production program is "managed in accordance with GAO's best practices for schedule development and cost estimating no later than July 14, 2025."[66] Yet GAO's recommendation on implementing an official integrated schedule, which was originally made in 2020 and to which NNSA agreed, remains open today.[67]

Conclusion

In rushing to production, NNSA has developed an excessively risky program structure, with management concerns around fundamental aspects such as the cost and schedule. To prevent further risk DOE should halt the planned production of new plutonium pits at the Savannah River site until preliminary or complete aging studies validate the requirement for new pits and NNSA can provide a life cycle cost estimate and an integrated master schedule that aligns with GAO's best practices – achievements that would align with the administration's reported goal of ensuring strong stewardship of government funds. NNSA aging research must examine both the state of our existing pits and the mitigating measures NNSA can take to extend the lifetime of pits, if needed. The results of NNSA's study must be made public in a detailed, unclassified summary. Without transparency, accountability, and action around this information, DOE may be enabling NNSA to waste billions of taxpayer dollars.

Congress and the American people deserve answers regarding this mismanagement to ensure a strong national defense. Therefore, we request that you respond to our questions by January 09, 2026:

1. When will the findings and recommendations of the DOE special study into NNSA's management of the pit production program be completed?

    a. Will there be a public version of the special study's findings?

    b. Will the study include an evaluation of the need for new pits?

    c. Will the study include an evaluation of the program's efficiency and stewardship of taxpayer dollars?

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report/213.

[65] U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee Report 118-205, "Energy and Water Development Appropriations Bill 2025," August 1, 2024, pp. 131-132, https://www.appropriations.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/fy25_ewd_senate_report.pdf.

[66] Letter from Comptroller General Gene L. Dodaro to Secretary of Energy Chris Wright, April 11, 2025, pp. 8-10, https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-25-108093.pdf.

[67] U.S. Government Accountability Office, "Nuclear Weapons: NNSA Does Not Have a Comprehensive Schedule or Cost Estimate for Pit Production Capability," Recommendations for Executive Action, January 12, 2023, https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-23-104661; U.S. Government Accountability Office, "Nuclear Weapons: NNSA Should Further Develop Cost, Schedule, and Risk Information for the W87-1 Warhead Program," Recommendations for Executive Action, September 23, 2020, https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-20-703.

2. If the DOE special study is complete, please provide a copy of the study.

3. When will the JASON independent review on pit aging be complete?

    a. How do you expect the results of JASON's independent review on pit aging to inform NNSA's pit production plans?

4. What changes will DOE and NNSA take to ensure their pit production budgets are accurate and transparent?

5. What is NNSA's timeline to complete GAO's recommendations regarding the pit production program?

6. How do DOE and NNSA align pit production goals with the weapon programs that pit production is supposed to support?

7. When does NNSA plan to complete its research into pit aging, given that the experimental infrastructure which NNSA plans to use to conduct the research is delayed?[68]

8. Has NNSA done an assessment on whether it is worth waiting to continue pit production until after the research into pit aging is complete? If so, please provide the assessment and its conclusion.

9. Has NNSA complied with the fiscal year 2024 NDAA requirement at 50 U.S.C. § 2538a(h) for NNSA to ensure the pit production program is "managed in accordance with GAO's best practices for schedule development and cost estimating no later than July 14, 2025"?[69]

10. The Stockpile Stewardship and Management Plan (SSMP) reported in 2015 that "pit reacceptance and reuse functions will augment pit production to ensure necessary quantities are readily available" to,[70] in 2024, saying without further research into pit aging, "a partial [pit] refurbishment strategy is no longer adequate to meet mission needs."[71] When will the fiscal year 2026 Stockpile Stewardship and Management Plan (SSMP) be released?

    a. Will the 2026 SSMP discuss the necessity of pit aging research in determining whether and how many new pits are required?

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[68] U.S. Department of Energy, "FY 2026 Congressional Justification: National Nuclear Security Administration," May 2025, p. 366, https://www.energy.gov/sites/default/files/2025-06/doe-fy-2026-vol-1.pdf.
[69] Letter from Comptroller General Gene L. Dodaro to Secretary of Energy Chris Wright, April 11, 2025, p. 8-10, https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-25-108093.pdf.
[70] U.S. Department of Energy, "Fiscal Year 2015 Stockpile Stewardship and Management Plan," April 2014, p. 4, https://www.energy.gov/sites/default/files/2017/08/f36/2014-04-11%2520FY15SSMP_FINAL_4-10-2014%5B1%5D.pdf.
[71] U.S. Department of Energy, "Fiscal Year 2024 Stockpile Stewardship and Management Plan," November 2023, p. 9, https://www.energy.gov/sites/default/files/2023-11/FY24SSMP_FINAL_NOVEMBER_2023_0.pdf.

11. In 2017, NNSA estimated that it would cost $3.6 billion to set up the Savannah River site to manufacture 80 pits per year,[72] and now the Savannah River site conversion cost estimate is up to $25 billion.[73] Given the delays in weapons programs like the Sentinel program, how has NNSA (in coordination with DoD and the Nuclear Weapons Council) updated the number of required plutonium pits?

    a. Has NNSA considered using previously produced pits to reduce the need? Please provide a copy of any analysis and its conclusion.

    b. Could the Los Alamos site supply a sufficient number of pits to meet the minimum requirements for the current weapons programs without the need for the facility at the Savannah River site?

12. Currently, NNSA believes the information it has on costs is "too immature."[74] When does NNSA believe it will have enough information to provide a comprehensive cost estimate both to develop the capacity to produce pits at the Los Alamos and Savannah River sites, and the sustainment of that production at those sites?

13. Did NNSA's FY2026 budget request include an estimate of how much it would cost to perform the pit production work at Los Alamos beyond construction activities?

    a. What is the amount NNSA estimates it would cost to perform pit production work at Los Alamos beyond construction activities?

14. Given that pit production will likely take longer and cost more than expected, what alternatives to new pit production have DOE and NNSA considered?

15. If DOE and NNSA have considered alternatives to new pit production, on what basis did NNSA determine that it would not follow any of these alternative options? Please provide a copy of any analysis related to the consideration of these alternatives and the decision to continue with new pit production.

16. According to public estimates, the United States already has enough W87-0 warheads to deploy one on each of the 400 Minuteman III missiles, and could do the same for deployment on its successor, the Sentinel missiles.[75] If that is true, is the primary driver

[72] Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, "Dealing with a debacle: A better plan for US plutonium pit production," Curtis T. Asplund and Frank von Hippel, April 27, 2023, https://thebulletin.org/2023/04/dealing-with-a-debacle-a-better-plan-for-us-plutonium-pit-production; U.S. Department of Energy, National Nuclear Security Administration, "Final Report for the Plutonium Pit Production Analysis of Alternatives," October 2017, p. 55, https://www.lasg.org/MPF2/documents/NNSA_PuPitAoA_Oct2017_redacted.pdf.

[73] Union of Concerned Scientists, "Plutonium Pit Production: The Risks and Costs of US Plans to Build New Nuclear Weapons," Dylan K. Spaulding, May 2025, p. xiii, https://www.ucs.org/sites/default/files/2025-06/Plutonium-Pit-Report-060225-FINAL.pdf.

[74] U.S. Government Accountability Office, "NNSA Does Not Have a Comprehensive Schedule or Cost Estimate for Pit Production Capability," January 2023, p. 53, https://www.gao.gov/assets/d23104661.pdf.

[75] Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, "Table 1. United States nuclear forces, 2024," https://thebulletin.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/rbul_a_2339170_t0001_oc.pdf.

for production of the W87-1 to give the United States the ability to upload more than one warhead on the Sentinel missile?

17. How are DOE and NNSA mitigating the risk of undermining faith in the U.S. nuclear deterrent by declaring pit production as the highest priority, but demonstrating severe challenges in producing plutonium pits?

18. Would DOE and NNSA agree that the United States would be better served by developing a plan to maintain the reliability of the nuclear stockpile without requiring large-scale, high-risk pit production?

19. Former NNSA Administrator Hruby has stated that new pits would be needed for the "latter half" of the production of the proposed W93 warhead, implying some of the warheads would use existing pits.[76] Would it be possible to reuse existing pits for the entire program?

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

John Garamendi
Member of Congress

CC:

The Honorable Brandon Williams, Administrator, National Nuclear Security Administration

[76] U.S. Department of Energy, Remarks by National Nuclear Security Administration Administrator Jill Hruby, April 18, 2024, https://www.energy.gov/nnsa/articles/nnsa-administrator-jill-hruby-remarks-strategic-weapons-21st-century-symposium.