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From Tri-Valley CAREs, Livermore, CA for Reporters and the Public: Our Initial Response to the Fiscal Year 2014 Budget Request for Nuclear Weapons

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Noon April 15, 2013: The “top line” budget numbers for the Department of Energy (DOE) National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) are now on the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) website. Tri-Valley CAREs notes with concern that the NNSA “nuclear weapons activities” are receiving an increase in this era of budget austerity.

The request of \$7.87 billion for Fiscal Year 2014 (page 89) is actually \$900 million (13 percent) above the FY 2013 final enacted level including the sequester. Indeed, all posted comparisons in the NNSA budget request to FY 2013 funding levels are misleading, because they do not reflect the effect of the 7.8 percent sequester.

Moreover, with or without sequester, this funding is excessive and should be cut back. To those looking for budget savings, there are hundreds of millions that can be trimmed here without sacrificing safety or security. Indeed by reining in select NNSA nuclear weapons programs that are unwise in conception and mismanaged in implementation, the nation will be made more, not less, secure.

The OMB budget request release states that within NNSA “nuclear weapons activities” there will be increases for nuclear weapon life extension programs, or LEPs (page 90). Among those listed is the B61 LEP. The estimated price tag for the B61 LEP has risen from less than \$4 billion to \$10.4 billion. Instead of granting an increase in FY 2014, Tri-Valley CAREs advocates that the government “pause” this LEP and reduce its scope from current plans to radically, and needlessly, alter the bomb to a more modest program that would change out its limited life components and remanufacture components as needed to original specs. This would not only save money in the FY 2014 budget, but save billions over the coming decade.

Further, the OMB budget request release states that there will be increases “initiating new upgrades for the W87 and W88 nuclear weapons” (page 90). This sentence covers a multitude of sins that may haunt the nuclear weapons budget for years to come. Weapons designers at Livermore Lab have a “preferred option” to radically redesign both warheads to create the nation’s first “interoperable” common platform warhead that could be launched atop a land-based ICBM or a submarine-launched missile. This “preferred option” would not only mix and match parts from the W78 and W88, but would use the core from a third weapon type, the W87, to create the ultimate “Fankenbomb” LEP. The essentially new warhead would be called the W78/88-1. Its development will threaten U.S. nuclear nonproliferation aims as well as budget goals. Tri-Valley CAREs believes that the W78/88-1 warhead LEP, if it goes forward as “preferred” by Livermore Lab, will make the \$10.4 billion estimated for the B61 LEP look like chickenfeed.

The FY 2014 budget process will determine whether the nation puts a down payment on far-flung, adventurous and unwise changes to existing U.S. nuclear weapons – or follows a more prudent and budget-friendly path of “curating” the existing nuclear weapons stockpile as it works with Russia and globally to reduce nuclear weapons stockpiles.

Tri-Valley CAREs also sees a few rays of sunshine in the OMB’s release of “top line” numbers and supporting text. We note with approval that the FY 2014 budget request will “achieve savings by reducing investments in the National Ignition Facility (NIF), which failed to achieve ignition in 2012 as scheduled.” Tri-Valley CAREs has tracked NIF since its conception. The budget “intel” we have received from administration and other sources suggests that the FY 2014 request’s NIF cut, while welcome, will be altogether too modest. Further, Tri-Valley CAREs advocates that NIF be taken away from NNSA altogether and placed in the DOE Office of Science, which could operate NIF as an unclassified user facility at a more modest budget. Tri-Valley CAREs has tracked NIF costs over the years, and when construction and related R&D are included, the tax-payers have invested upwards of \$7.5 billion in the NIF. We should not continue to throw good money after bad into NNSA’s mishandling of NIF. Instead, Tri-Valley CAREs believes we should find out what kind of science the nation can get for its investment.

Your nuclear watchdogs here at Tri-Valley CAREs will provide additional analysis as soon as the detailed budget becomes available, and then longer analysis and recommendations in the days to come. Please see www.trivalleycares.org to read the “Key Questions for Reporters to Ask” that we and our allies in the Alliance for Nuclear Accountability prepared in advance.

Reporters may also email Tri-Valley CAREs at marylia@trivalleycares.org or call us at 925.443.7148.

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