

weatherization and infrastructure repair for every \$1 billion spent. Increased personal consumption from tax cuts was the only stimulus method studied that was inferior to military spending, the study said. "Spending money on defense is in general a poor stimulus for the economy and won't generate as many jobs as spending that money outside NNSA would," Mello said. "So there's not a strong stimulus impact from this and I would rather have NNSA take care of its general plant projects and D&D through the normal budget process and not try to make headroom in its budget opportunistically because we have an economic crisis."

Mello also criticized the lack of oversight in the process. "The lack of controls over this money is alarming," Mello said. "We need more careful oversight, not less, and frankly NNSA has too much money in its weapons program now. They don't need extra money to take care of their roads. They need to trim the fat where they have the fat and take care of their roads."

—Todd Jacobson

## **HOUSE SET TO BEGIN DEBATE ON FY09 OMNIBUS APPROPS. BILL**

The House is set to begin debate this week on the Fiscal Year 2009 omnibus appropriations bill, which would fund the National Nuclear Security Administration and most other federal agencies for the remainder of the fiscal year. The final details of the bill have not been made public, though considerable differences between the Senate and House versions of the bill exist, especially with regard to the agency's weapons program. The House FY2009 Energy and Water Appropriations bill, which was reported out of committee but never brought to the floor, included \$6.04 billion for the NNSA's weapons program, well under the NNSA's \$6.62 billion request. The Senate version, which was also only reported out of committee, would commit approximately \$6.52 billion for the weapons program. Both chambers provided significantly more money for the agency's nonproliferation programs above the \$1.25 billion request.

The House and Senate both zeroed out the Administration's controversial request for the Reliable Replacement Warhead program, but the chambers disagreed on several other key programs, including the production of pits for the W-88 warhead, the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement facility to be built at Los Alamos National Laboratory and the Uranium Processing Facility at the Y-12 National Security Complex. Since the start of FY09 on Oct. 1, 2008, DOE and most other federal agencies have

been funded at FY08 appropriated-levels through a Continuing Resolution currently set to expire March 6.

—Todd Jacobson

## **NNSA CONSIDERING CMR ALTERNATIVES IF REPLACEMENT DRASTICALLY DELAYED**

Faced with expected budget cuts and potential decision-making delays on its Complex Transformation plans, the National Nuclear Security Administration is ramping up discussions about how to get by without one of the facilities it was relying on as the keystone for its future plans—the nuclear portion of the Chemistry and Metallurgy Research Replacement facility to be built at Los Alamos National Laboratory. Officials from LANL are set to brief National Nuclear Security Administration Principal Deputy Administrator William Ostendorff as early as this week on alternatives for eventually moving work out of the aging Chemistry and Metallurgy Research facility, and alternatives include using the plutonium facility at the lab's Technical Area-55 and further exploration of an upgrade to the under-construction Radiological Laboratory, Utility and Office Building (RLUOB) to a Category 2 nuclear facility if the CMRR-Nuclear Facility is "significantly delayed" beyond its 2018 startup date.

The CMRR-Nuclear Facility, which has been estimated to cost as much as \$2 billion, has been central to the NNSA's Complex Transformation plans and would allow much of the analytical chemistry and material characterization work at the 1950s-era CMR building to be moved to a new facility. The Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board has pushed the NNSA to move out of the aging facility, saying it "poses significant risks to workers and the public" in an October 2007 letter to NNSA Administrator Thomas D'Agostino, but the project has faced opposition in Congress over its need and over design concerns. The House version of the Fiscal Year 2009 Energy and Water Appropriations bill zeroed out funding for the project, while the FY2009 Defense Authorization Act withholds the authorization of \$50 million over concerns about the design of the new facility. The facility is currently being designed and won't be completed until 2018 at the earliest.

### **Safety Basis for Post-2010 CMR Nearing Completion**

In the meantime, the lab is nearing the completion of a Documented Safety Analysis for extending the life of the facility past 2010, but it's also begun considering fallback plans if construction of the CMRR facility is delayed beyond 2018. In addition to using TA-55 and the RLUOB as an alternative to the CMRR, the lab is also considering accelerating work to process legacy residue materials

currently stored in the vault at TA-55, freeing up space that would've been provided in the CMRR-Nuclear Facility. The NNSA has also considered using Lawrence Livermore's Superblock facility and the Nevada Test Site's Device Assembly Facility as a CMRR substitute. Sample preparation and activities with plutonium-238 would after 2010 move out of CMR and to TA-55 (*NW&M Monitor*, Vol. 12 No. 16).

Lab spokesman Kevin Roark would not comment on the details of the lab's CMRR "exit strategy," but he said the need for CMRR has been made clear, both by the lab and the DNFSB. "We've been very clear with what we feel is a critical need and that's the CMRR nuclear facility," Roark said. "Without it, our options are limited. We're continuing to reduce our risks in there but at some point we've got to get out of there." The NNSA declined to comment about the options being considered for the "exit strategy."

Construction on the RLUOB facility by construction contractor Austin Commercial is ongoing and expected to be completed this year, and it will take another two years for special process equipment to be installed, meaning it will be until 2011 before employees can move into the building. The building has been designed to hold only radiological quantities of special nuclear material, and extensive and costly upgrades would be needed for it to be elevated to a Category 2 nuclear facility.

### **CMRR Design Hits Hurdles**

The design of the CMRR facility has also run into problems, with the DNFSB informing the NNSA of "Findings" that would prohibit it from certifying to Congress that the facility, and its active confinement system, could withstand Performance Category-3-level earthquakes, long a concern at the facility. In the FY2009 Defense Authorization Act, Congress prohibited the NNSA from spending more than \$50.2 million on the CMRR—\$50 million less than the \$100.2 million the NNSA requested—until the NNSA and the DNFSB certified that concerns about the design of safety class systems (including ventilation systems) and seismic issues had been resolved. Los Alamos is located in a seismically sensitive area of New Mexico, and the existing CMR facility does not meet current earthquake standards, which have increased substantially over the last few decades at LANL.

NNSA design plans to downgrade the PC-3 seismic design requirements for the active confinement ventilation system and support systems were "not acceptable," the DNFSB said as part of a Jan. 16 letter to NNSA Assistant Deputy Administrator for Nuclear Safety and Operations Gerald Talbot that urged the agency to "reaffirm its commitment

to seismically design the active confinement ventilation system to PC-3 seismic design requirements."

The confinement system would be used to prevent radioactive releases, trapping potential releases in filters and ventilation systems, but the NNSA had indicated to the DNFSB that cost was preventing the qualification of the system and some parts to the rigorous PC-3 standards. "The CMRR Nuclear Safety Design Strategy ... states that it may not be economically feasible to seismically design and qualify some components of the active confinement ventilation system or its support system to PC-3 seismic design requirements," the DNFSB wrote in its Findings report.

### **Structural Issues Identified**

In a separate Findings report detailing seismic design issues with the facility, the DNFSB was less harsh but continued to raise problems about the adequacy of the design for PC-3 seismic events. Specifically, the report indicates that extensive openings on the mezzanine floor of the facility create structural challenges, and it's not clearly understood how connections between columns and interstitial walls can be designed to withstand earthquakes. "The CMRR project should not proceed into final design until there is high confidence that the CMRR structural capacity is adequate for the PC-3 seismic design ground motions and that there are no significant unresolved design issue," the report said.

NNSA spokesman Darwin Morgan said the NNSA is reviewing the design of the facility and would present its final design plan to the DNFSB. "We are aware of their concerns," Morgan said in a statement provided to *NW&M Monitor*. "We are in the midst of a major internal review of our design plan and feel confident that the board's questions will be answered when they see the results of this review. We look forward to continuing to work constructively with them to ensure that the CMRR is safe."

—Todd Jacobson

## **GAO LOOKING INTO NNSA'S PLANNED MOVE TO NEW KANSAS CITY PLANT**

The Government Accountability Office is investigating the National Nuclear Security Administration's planned move to a new Kansas City Plant in a review requested by two powerful Senate appropriators, *NW&M Monitor* has learned. The review, which is still in its early stages, was requested by Sen. Byron Dorgan (D-N.D.), the chairman of the Senate Energy and Water Appropriations Subcommittee, and former Sen. Pete Domenici (R-N.M.), who had