Remarks by Chairman David Hobson – House Appropriations Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development
National Academy of Sciences
Committee on International Security and Arms Control

Symposium on "Post-Cold War U.S. Nuclear Strategy:
A Search for Technical and Policy Common Ground."

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Thank you for inviting me to speak here today. I appreciate the opportunity to come back to Washington D.C. to get away from all the Presidential campaigning in Ohio. Living in a so-called "battleground state" may have its political advantages, but it also sometimes feels like you are living in the middle of a . . . well, the middle of a battleground. So the peace and quiet of Washington in August is refreshing.

Many of you believe that I am a relative newcomer to the issue of nuclear weapons because last year was my first full year as Chairman of the Energy and Water Development Appropriations Subcommittee. However, I often have to remind folks that I have been a member of the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee since January 1995, and have become quite familiar with what the Department of Defense spends to maintain our strategic nuclear forces. What is relatively new to me is to find out how much the Department of Energy spends to maintain our nuclear arsenal, and the complex necessary to support that arsenal. For those of you who don't know, DOE will spend approximately $6.3 billion dollars this fiscal year on nuclear weapons activities, and has requested $6.6 billion for fiscal year 2005.

As an appropriator, I bring a very specific perspective to this topic. Appropriators want to know what work needs to be done and how much it will cost, because every dollar spent on DOE nuclear weapons work is a dollar not spent on some other competing national priority. In this case, my job is to ask Secretary Abraham and Ambassador Brooks the hard questions concerning the nuclear weapons complex and whether spending over $6 billion dollars annually on the DOE nuclear weapons complex is the right investment for the country.

To educate myself, I spent much of my time over the last year and a half traveling to many of the DOE facilities to see first hand how the complex was being run. I visited the Livermore National Laboratory and the Nevada Test Site. I went to the Pantex plant in Texas and the Y-12 plant in Tennessee. In the next several months, I plan to visit the two weapons laboratories in New Mexico and the Savannah River Site in South Carolina. At these DOE locations, I saw hundreds of staff dedicating their professional lives to our national defense. As a nation, we have dedicated an enormous amount of skilled scientific and engineering talent to nuclear weapons. I certainly do not want to belittle their dedication and commitment, since they were key in helping us win World War II and eventually win the Cold War. However, I also saw a weapons complex that could be viewed as a jobs program for Ph.Ds – the ultimate in white-collar welfare – where the federal oversight organization did not demand accountability for performance and where the business practices were two decades behind the times. Visiting the nuclear weapons complex is like stepping back in a time capsule. It is not just that some

of the facilities date back to the early Cold War years, but some of the staff and certainly much of the thinking is of the same vintage.

In last year's fiscal year 2004 bill, we started the modernization process by requiring the Department to compete its laboratory contracts that had not been competed in over 50 years, including the two weapons laboratories, Los Alamos and Lawrence Livermore. You may not realize this, but these laboratory contracts were never competed when they were initially awarded back in the 1940s, and have never been competed since. Nothing ensures beneficial change as much as true competition.

In last year's bill and continuing again in our FY2005 House bill and report, I also put the brakes on a number of new nuclear weapons initiatives, including the Modern Pit Facility, Advanced Concepts research, and the Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator.

Finally, I wanted to see some tangible evidence that the Department was serious about moving beyond the Cold War policies that resulted in the continued existence of a nuclear weapons stockpile sized to fight the Soviet Union. To demonstrate that we were serious, we did something last year that was probably under the radar screen for most people, but which paid dramatic benefits this year. As you know, in late 2001, President Bush signed the Moscow Treaty committing to significant reductions in the number of deployed U.S. strategic nuclear warheads by the year 2012. But subsequent to the President's decision, there was no evidence that the Department of Energy and the Department of Defense were serious about reducing the stockpile to meet that goal. In the fiscal year 2004 bill, we fenced off some weapons money until we received a revised Stockpile Plan that reflected the President's commitment to shrink the stockpile. We finally received the plan in June. While the details are classified, this plan will reduce our nuclear stockpile to roughly half of its current size. After years of maintaining a nuclear stockpile sized for the Cold War, we are finally bringing the numbers down to a more realistic and responsible level. I believe Ambassador Brooks deserves a great deal of credit for finally getting the new Stockpile Plan through the bureaucratic maze and up to the Hill.

I see the serious challenges for the nuclear weapons complex as managerial and policy challenges rather than the technical challenges typically faced in the past. Many of these challenges will require difficult decisions that the Department of Energy has resisted making to date. Although the new stockpile plan finally shows major out-year reductions in our nuclear stockpile, the complex that exists is still one that was built during the Cold War to support a Cold War stockpile.

The current funding of approximately $6.3 billion is used to support a weapons complex that is neither building any new weapons nor testing our current stockpile. The current DOE weapons program is essentially a large physics experiment conducted so that the Laboratory Directors are able to certify annually for the government that the stockpile is reliable enough to avoid underground nuclear tests. I support that stockpile stewardship mission — we need to ensure the continued safety, security, and reliability of our stockpile without a resumption of nuclear testing. But I have my doubts about whether spending scarce national resources to pursue new weapons concepts is the best use of those resources for our national security. In our House bill, we chose instead to dedicate resources to dismantlement and nuclear nonproliferation efforts.

What is the deterrent value of our nuclear stockpile for the threats of the 21st century? Other than a Cold War "Russia gone bad" scenario, I do not believe that our nuclear stockpile is useful against our new foes. I am sure that the rest of the world recognizes the fact that the U.S. has overwhelming military superiority in both conventional and nuclear weapons. However, has our

current inventory of thousands of nuclear weapons dissuaded North Korea from building nuclear weapons? Is Iran being dissuaded from developing nuclear weapons capability by our massive stockpile? These are rhetorical questions because we all know the answer is no. North Korea and Iran are not being dissuaded by our nuclear stockpile.

So what is the point of threatening a terrorist with an earth-penetrating nuclear weapon? Part of the argument is to hold every target at risk so that there is no safe haven for a terrorist. But as we have seen over the past three years, holding terrorist targets at risk has little to do with being able to kill them once they have been found. Some think that, if we had low-yield nuclear weapons in our arsenal, we should have used them on some of Saddam Hussein's bunkers that we assumed to be holding weapons of mass destruction. To discuss the use of nuclear weapons in the same context that we discuss the use of the conventional arms just does not make sense. It leads to policy outcomes that are irrational in today's post-Cold War world.

I was not comfortable with the Administration's emphasis on new nuclear weapons initiatives in the fiscal year 2004 budget request and repeated in the fiscal year 2005 request. I view the Advanced Concepts research proposal, the Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator study, and the effort to reduce the nuclear test readiness posture to 18 months as very provocative and overly aggressive policies that undermine our moral authority to argue that other nations should forego nuclear weapons. We cannot advocate for nuclear nonproliferation around the globe and pursue more useable nuclear weapon options here at home. That inconsistency is not lost on anyone in the international community.

So what is the role of nuclear weapons in the post-Cold War national security strategy of the United States? From my perspective, that role is very, very limited. We have used a total of two such weapons during wartime, and we all hope those will be the last two ever used. As long as other nations have stockpiles of nuclear weapons, the United States will always need a robust nuclear deterrent to defend us and maintain a balance of power that stabilizes the nuclear-armed world. But the glory years for the nuclear weapon complex are over. Never again will the Federal agencies and national labs have the discretion or the budget that was allowed during the Cold War to pursue any type of nuclear weapon research no matter what the cost.

I do want to emphasize that I support the modernization of the Department of Energy's nuclear weapons complex, but that modernization should take the form of a program that recognizes the limited role that nuclear weapons play in our national security strategy. As I said earlier, the current problems that plague the nuclear weapons complex are not budget-related, they are management problems: recurrent security failures; continued delays in achieving program milestones; construction project schedule delays and cost overruns. These are all problems resulting from a lack of realistic priority-setting and oversight from the Federal managers. These problems are not solved by additional funding for the nuclear weapons complex, but rather by holding people and organizations accountable for their performance.

What are the serious threats to our national security involving the nuclear weapons stockpile? Because the stockpile is being indefinitely maintained without additional weapons production and underground testing, the competence of the entire complex from the federal oversight personnel to the contractor and subcontractor employees dictates how confident we are in the reliability of our stockpile. For me, the greatest threat to our stockpile is the erosion of the competence and credibility of the nuclear weapons complex to do its job. The continued security lapses and the business management failures that prompted my action to require DOE to compete its laboratory contracts,

including the two weapons physics laboratories, erodes the confidence the nation must have in the competency of the DOE complex.

The national laboratory cultural attitude of "we-know-best" exhibited by many of the long-time employees threatens the reputation of the entire enterprise. If the safety, security, and reliability of the stockpile — and by that I also mean the deterrent value of the stockpile — is really a reflection of the reputation and competency of the nuclear weapons complex, then the continuing problems at the labs and plants are a more serious national security concern than the existence or nonexistence of a robust nuclear earth penetrator.

During the fiscal year 2005 budget hearings, I pressed the Secretary of Energy on the need for a systematic review of requirements for the weapons complex over the next twenty-five years, and the Secretary committed to conducting such a review. I believe such a study should assess the implications of the President's decisions on the size and composition of the stockpile, the cost and operational impacts of all the new post 9/11 security requirements, and the personnel, facilities, and budgetary resources required to support the smaller stockpile.

It is my view that the Secretary should assemble a team of outside experts to assist with this review. We need outsiders to bring in new ideas. I recognize that some entrenched interests may be threatened by such a review, but that is the point. Prior reviews have largely been conducted by insiders from the weapons complex, who produce predictable but not very credible recommendations that the Department should preserve the status quo and maintain all existing facilities and capabilities. This effort will require an objective review that is only possible with the help of independent experts who are not, and have not been, part of the NNSA weapons complex. I hope this review will have as much to do with setting nuclear weapons policy for the next twenty years as any additional Presidential Decision Directives.

I want to come back to where I started, which is with an appropriator's view of the weapons complex. To use an old Cold War phrase, appropriators are constantly asking the question, where do we get the most bang for our buck, or rumble for our ruble? We still have our kids being killed and maimed in Iraq because we, as a country, haven't spent enough on armored Humvees or ballistic protection vests for our troops. If you ask me today, I believe a billion dollars spent on such conventional measures would be a much better investment than a billion dollars in the DOE weapons complex. If the money were Secretary Rumsfeld's to spend, I believe he would spend it on the troops and conventional weapons rather than on nuclear weapons. We have too many unmet conventional defense needs in the present day to afford spending over $6 billion dollars annually to support a large and antiquated nuclear weapons complex.

In the long run, I think we need to face up to another national security threat that has received too little attention to date, and that is the need for a safe and secure central underground repository for our spent nuclear fuel and high level radioactive waste. It is shameful for the Administration to propose inadequate funding for the Yucca Mountain repository while seeking a significant increase for the nuclear weapons complex. I don't believe that pursuing new weapons initiatives contributes anything to our national security in the near future. However, continuing to store spent fuel all over the country, often near major population centers, poses a much greater risk to our national security. In the long run, I believe we need to revisit the question of reprocessing so that we have to deal with a smaller volume of spent fuel, that will be radioactive for much less time. In the near term, however we

need Yucca Mountain far more than we need Advanced Concepts, a Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator, enhanced test readiness, or a Modern Pit Facility.

Thank you for you time and attention.