

News from Congressman Les AuCoin

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Statement of Rep. Les AuCoin (D-Ore.)

Introduction of Nuclear Weapons Material Production Termination Act

I want to thank everyone for joining us today. Now that the superpower arms race is over, we're unveiling a measure to hasten the end of the nuclear era here at home.

Communism is banned in the Soviet Union.

The Warsaw Pact no longer exists.

And the U.S. no longer needs to produce weapons grade uranium, plutonium, or tritium.

With Congressman Synar, I have introduced the Nuclear Weapons Materials Production Termination Act. Our bill would prohibit the construction or operation of new or existing facilities to produce nuclear weapons material. This is stuff we don't need, can't afford, and are better off without.

Still mired in the past, DOE is reserving its right to spend billions of dollars making tritium. But our bill would mean that we'd have to get any nuclear weapons material from the warheads we'll be retiring.

This will be real arms control.

It will redirect the Department of Energy to what the country needs: a real clean-up of the radioactive and toxic legacy of the arms race.

200 miles up the Columbia River from my district, Hanford is a nuclear accident in slow motion, the legacy of 45 years of nuclear weapons production.

This accident threatens the health, safety, and livelihood of the people of the Northwest. I'm talking about billions of gallons of waste pumped directly into the ground, and millions more escaping into the Columbia from chronically leaking tanks.

Ladies and gentlemen, 20 percent of the economy of my state is based on the Columbia River. Hanford's slow motion accident cannot, and must not, continue.

Today, we have within our grasp a chance to avoid this catastrophe.

The money we save on production must be used for cleaning up the environmental damage done by earlier nuclear weapons production. A large part of the cleanup cost -- perhaps more than half -- would need to be spent cleaning up the Hanford nuclear reservation. Our legislation, then, could free up between a quarter of a billion and one billion dollars a year for clean-up at the Hanford nuclear reservation.

Shall we spend money for new nukes, or for cleaning up the mess made by old nukes?

In this instance, the answer is clear: we don't need the weapons. We desperately need the clean-up -- at Hanford, at Rocky Flats, at Savannah River, and other DOE production sites around the country. Now that we've put the nuclear era behind us abroad, let's take care of our own at home.