

UPF a massive investment for ... what, exactly?

Guest columnist

Did you know that factions of your government are planning to build a new uranium processing facility (UPF) almost in our back yard? Yes, in Oak Ridge, Tennessee at the existing Y12 nuclear facility, just 100 air miles from Asheville. The estimated cost at inception in 2007 was \$1.5 billion; today after vetting from several cognizant federal agencies, the estimate has reached \$19 billion. There is disagreement



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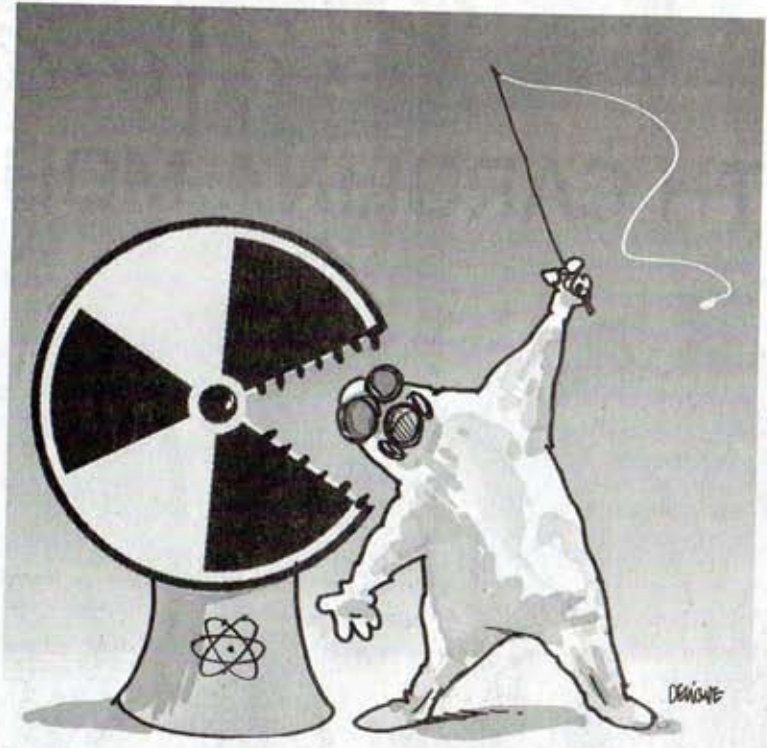
OPINION

among the agencies regarding safety measures, security measures, whether to build subterranean or above ground. Why build? Supporters say the U.S. needs additional capability, a new UPF, to continue supplying highly refined uranium for the warheads on our nuclear-armed submarines and missile silos, even though the 4,650 on hand plus the 3,000 in storage are deemed functional for another 50 to 100 years. We and the 96 other signatory nations are committed by treaty to reduce our nuclear weapons capability in order to achieve their eventual elimination. This "build down" is ongoing, with Russia and the U.S. almost halv-

ing their arsenals. On one hand we are committed to lead the world in reducing and eventually eliminating all nuclear weapons to avoid nuclear devastation and to safeguard and permit continuing biological life on the planet. On the other hand we send a message about planning for additional nuclear weapons capability for more than the next century. Why wouldn't this cause those in other countries and even our own citizens to doubt U.S. intentions, our commitment to phase out the nuclear threat?

How else could we invest \$19 billion? Well, we do have a large national debt, we do have an infrastructure of roads, bridges, water and sewer systems crumbling about us, we do have health care and social safety net needs, we do have educational needs and underpaid teachers — yes, we could well invest \$19 billion for some real needs.

But what about jobs, jobs that would be needed by a new UPF? Jobs that will be lost by building down, phasing out nuclear weapons production? It is no secret that funds invested in civilian needs will yield 3 to 7 times more jobs than an equal amount invested in military wants — rather than job loss we



would have job gain. How about the ever-present danger of an accident, a mistake or a terrorist attack on the proposed UPF? These possibilities are some of the sticking points slowing the UPF planning. Even if they are satisfactorily resolved the cost could even exceed the \$19 billion and the plant

would not be operable until the year 2038. By 2038 the entire U.S. nuclear arsenal will have undergone already planned life-extension refurbishment at existing plants e.g. Y-12 Oak Ridge, Pantex in Texas. So we come back to our original question why build a new \$19 billion UPF?

Do you want to pay for this hugely expensive, poorly justified, unneeded colossus with your tax dollars? Do you want to pay to help undercut nuclear weapon build-down and contribute to perpetuation of worldwide nuclear threat?

To hear the latest on this quandary plan to attend "Nuclear Abolition at Ground Zero", 7 p.m. Thursday at First Congregational United Church of Christ, 20 Oak St. sponsored by Western NC Physicians for Social Responsibility. The speaker will be Ralph Hutchison from the Oak Ridge Environmental Peace Alliance — free program with refreshments.

To get more insight on this topic:

» For background on UPF, see www.orepa.org, (See OREPA News, May 2013).

» For treaties, Google NPT, Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty; also START 2.

» For nuclear war, see www.PSR.org, (see Resources/Reports).

» For nuclear warhead lifetime, see www.UCSUSA.org (see Nuclear Weapons & Global Security).

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