

Title: **Haley: Federal agency owes state \$1M daily in 2016**
 Author: BY SEANNA ADCOX Associated Press
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Haley: Federal agency owes state \$1M daily in 2016

The Savannah River Site's mixed-oxide project is years behind schedule

MOX intended to turn weapons-grade plutonium into commercial nuclear reactor fuel

Without MOX operational, feds mandated to remove a metric ton of plutonium from state by Jan. 1

BY SEANNA ADCOX
 Associated Press

COLUMBIA

Gov. Nikki Haley has warned the Department of Energy she expects South Carolina to collect a \$1 million daily fine for the agency's failure to meet a Jan. 1 nuclear fuel deadline.



Haley

In a letter obtained by The Associated Press, Haley told Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz that South Carolina "will almost certainly be forced" to sue if his agency doesn't start making payments on New Year's Day.

"South Carolina cannot stand idly by while DOE violates federal law and fails to fulfill its commitment to the state," Haley wrote in the letter dated

Monday.

The Savannah River Site's mixed-oxide project - known as MOX - is intended to turn weapons-grade plutonium into commercial nuclear reactor fuel. But it's years behind schedule.

Since MOX isn't operating, by law the federal government is supposed to remove 1 metric ton of plutonium from South Carolina by Jan. 1. If not, the agency's supposed to pay \$1 million a day for "economic and impact assistance," up to \$100 million yearly, until either the facility meets production goals or the plutonium's taken out of state for storage or disposal elsewhere.

However, a clause in the law makes the fine "subject to the availability of appropriations."

A spokeswoman for DOE's National Nuclear Security Administration, which manages the project, said the agency "is working to meet its commitment to the state of South Carolina."

MOX is intended to help the United States fulfill an agreement with Russia to dispose of at least 34 metric tons apiece of weapons-grade plutonium. According to NNSA, that's enough material for about 17,000 nuclear warheads. The General Accountability Office has said the project is more than three years behind its deadline and at least \$3 billion over budget.

"South Carolina is certainly grateful to play an important role in the United States' nuclear non-proliferation efforts and for the benefits the MOX

facility brings to our state, but this does not come without risk to South Carolina," Haley wrote. "The security, economic and environmental interests of South Carolina are at stake with long-term storage of these materials in our state, particularly when there is no apparent or immediate plan for its disposal or removal."

In September, Attorney General Alan Wilson warned the Department of Energy that he's prepared to sue - again - if MOX isn't made a priority. South Carolina sued the Obama administration last year after officials said they wanted to shutter the project, citing cost overruns and delays. In its lawsuit, the state said the federal government had made a commitment to South Carolina and

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shouldn't mothball the effort, noting it legally couldn't use money intended to build the plant to shut it down.

The state dropped the

suit several months later. But in the months since, the administration has said it's searching for a cheaper way to dispose of the plutonium.



ANNETTE M. DROWLETTE The Augusta Chronicle

The mixed oxide (MOX) fuel fabrication facility construction site at the Savannah River Site.

Title: **Abortion clinic, waste firm agree to \$7,800 in fines**
 Author: BY SEANNA ADCOX Associated Press
 Size: 25.26 square inch
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Abortion clinic, waste firm agree to \$7,800 in fines

BY SEANNA ADCOX
 Associated Press

COLUMBIA

An abortion clinic in South Carolina and a waste disposal company have agreed to pay the state's public health agency nearly \$8,000 in fines for violations concerning the disposal of fetuses.

Signed agreements and letters provided Tuesday to The Associated Press show the Charleston Women's Medical Center paid a \$1,800 fine earlier this month for not accurately reporting the amount of fetal waste it generates. Texas-based disposal company MedSharps agreed to a \$6,000 fine for improper transport - to be paid in six installments starting Jan. 4.

Representatives of neither the clinic nor the company returned messages for comment.

A spokeswoman for the

state Department of Health and Environmental Control said Tuesday that negotiations continue with another disposal company and two other abortion clinics in South Carolina.

They are the second round of fines stemming from the agency's inspections this fall.

The clinics in Columbia and Greenville paid combined fines of \$10,250 in September for health licensing violations.

DHEC Director Catherine Heigel told legislators last month about the additional fines related to infectious waste disposal regulations. She said then that the fines could amount to nearly \$51,000.

Final consent orders with the Charleston clinic and MedSharps - effective Dec. 7 and Dec. 8, respectively - show they'll pay about \$2,000 less than the agency proposed.

Republicans in South

Carolina launched multiple investigations into abortion clinics after the release of secretly taped videos showing Planned Parenthood officials in other states discussing the collection of fetal organs for research. Gov. Nikki Haley asked for the investigation by DHEC, which regulates the clinics.

Of the three clinics in South Carolina, Planned Parenthood operates only the one in Columbia.

Democrats have called the multiple investigations a waste of time and money, as they've found no evidence of criminal activity at the clinics or of taxpayer money being illegally spent on abortions.

Planned Parenthood officials have repeatedly said none of the organization's clinics in the South Atlantic region - which includes the Carolinas - participates in fetal tissue collection.



Title: **Education board names new chairman**
 Author: NATHANIEL CARY NCARY@GREENVILLENEWS.COM
 Size: 27.74 square inch
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Education board names new chairman

NATHANIEL CARY
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The South Carolina State Board of Education has named a new chair and vice-chair and the term's of four board members, including Greenville's representative, will end. The board unanimously elected Michael Brenan as chair and Ivan Randolph as vice chair. Brenan is Governor Nikki Haley's appointee to the SBE, while Randolph represents the 8th Circuit (Abbeville, Greenwood, Laurens, Newberry). Danny Varat of Greenville, who represented the

13th Circuit (Greenville, Pickens), will rotate off the board as his four-year term comes to an end. Other board members whose terms come to an end include: Jim Griffith, 2nd Circuit (Aiken, Bamberg, Barnwell), Lonzena Harry; 3rd Circuit (Clarendon, Lee, Sumter, Williamsburg); and Thomas Shortt, 15th Circuit (Georgetown, Horry). They will be replaced in January by representatives elected by the local delegations of Bamberg, Williamsburg, Pickens and Horry. The SBE is the policy-making body for public elementary and secondary education in South Carolina. It consists of 17 members, one appointed from

each of the state's 16 judicial circuits by the legislators representing the various circuits, and a 17th member appointed by the governor. Brenan, the new chair, is the State/Group President of BB&T for South Carolina and is the Governor's Appointee to the State Board of Education, a capacity he has served in since 2010. Mr. Brenan also serves on the board of directors and educational organizations including the South

Carolina Chamber of Commerce, United Way of the Midlands, and Transform SC. Randolph was superintendent of Abbeville County School District for eight years and served in the United States Navy and North Carolina National Guard. "My colleagues on the South Carolina State Board of Education are extremely pleased with the succession of leadership at the board level," Traci Young Cooper, immediate past SBE Chair and 5th Judicial Circuit representative, said in a statement. "Our board is committed to serving our constituents and keeping the students of South Carolina as our top priority,"



Michael Brenan



Danny Varat



Ivan Randolph

Title: **Haley: Agency owes \$1M daily fine**
 Author: SEANNA ADCOX ASSOCIATED PRESS
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Haley: Agency owes \$1M daily fine

SEANNA ADCOX
ASSOCIATED PRESS

COLUMBIA - Gov. Nikki Haley has warned the Department of Energy she expects South Carolina to collect a \$1 million daily fine for the agency's failure to meet a Jan. 1 nuclear fuel deadline.

In a letter obtained by The Associated Press, Haley told Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz that South Carolina "will almost certainly be forced" to sue if his agency doesn't start making payments on New Year's Day.

"South Carolina cannot stand idly by while DOE violates federal law and fails to fulfill its commitment to the state," Haley wrote in the letter dated Monday.

The Savannah River Site's mixed-oxide project — known as MOX — is intended to turn weapons-grade plutonium into commercial nuclear reactor fuel. But it's years behind schedule.

Since MOX isn't operating, by law the federal government is supposed to remove 1 metric ton of plutonium from South Carolina by Jan. 1. If not, the agency's supposed to pay \$1 million a day for "economic and impact as-

sistance," up to \$100 million yearly, until either the facility meets production goals or the plutonium's taken out of state for storage or disposal elsewhere.

However, a clause in the law makes the fine "subject to the availability of appropriations."

Asked about the letter, a spokeswoman for DOE's National Nuclear Security Administration, which manages the project, said the agency "is working to meet its commitment to the state of South Carolina."

Spokeswoman Francie Israeli did not comment further.

U.S. Sens. Lindsey Graham and Tim Scott and U.S. Rep. Joe Wilson have previously encouraged Haley to sue to keep the project going.

"South Carolina should pursue all options at its disposal," Graham spokesman Kevin Bishop said Tuesday.

MOX is intended to help the United States fulfill an agreement with Russia to dispose of at least 34 metric tons apiece of weapons-grade plutonium. According to NNSA, that's enough material for about 17,000 nuclear warheads.

Construction began in 2007. The General Accountability Office has said the project is more than three years behind its 2016 completion deadline — and, at \$8 billion, at least \$3 billion over budget.

"South Carolina is certainly grateful to play an important role in the United States' nuclear nonproliferation efforts and for the benefits the MOX facility brings to our state, but this does not come without risk to South Carolina," Haley wrote.

"The security, economic and environmental interests of South Carolina are at stake with long-term storage of these materials in our state, particularly when there is no apparent or immediate plan for its disposal or removal."

In September, Attorney General Alan Wilson warned the Department of Energy that he's prepared to sue — again — if MOX isn't made a priority.

The state of South Carolina sued the Obama administration last year after officials said they wanted to shutter the project, citing cost overruns and delays.

Title: **18 bridges state-wide fast-tracked for replacement**
 Author: CASSIE COPE CCOPE@THESTATE.COM
 Size: 50.68 square inch
 Greenville, SC Circulation: 113473



18 bridges state-wide fast-tracked for replacement

October flooding
brings issues to light

CASSIE COPE

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EASTOVER - Ruth Ashford and her neighbors in the Eastover area are going to get a new bridge to replace one that was washed away on Congress Road.

The bridge is one of 18 state-wide that is being fast-tracked for replacement in the aftermath of the historic flooding that hit South Carolina in October. The cost of replacing the bridges is included in the \$137 million for road repairs that the Transportation Department says it needs because of the flooding.

"I'm really sorry that it has taken something so catastrophic as this (flooding) to really force us to do what we, as a state, should have been doing — maintaining those bridges," said state Sen. Darrell Jackson, D-Richland.

A third of the bridges that will be replaced were "structurally deficient" before the flooding. Those bridges included deteriorating structures that were being monitored by the Transportation Department but remained safe to drive over, not requiring weight restrictions on vehicles crossing. However, the bridges were not scheduled for repairs any time soon, like hundreds of other deteriorating bridges in the state.

South Carolina has 805 structurally deficient bridges, including 67 in Richland and Lexington counties. Statewide, 367 structurally deficient bridges have weight restrictions. Seven others are closed for safety reasons.

Getting South Carolina's bridge system in good condition would take an added \$71 million a year through 2040, according to the Transportation Department.

When lawmakers return in January, they will decide whether to raise taxes, reform the state Transportation Department or do both to pay for road and bridge repairs.

'Mobility was cut off'

Ashford's neighbor, Sara Ash, is excited the broken Eastover bridge will be replaced with a brand new one, expected to be completed by March 31.

Ash said she has managed to find ways to get around, even with the bridge being out. But during the October storm's peak, she said, the area was temporarily isolated.

"It proved your vulnerability and how much you depend on roads (and) government agencies," she said.

The state's roads agency is working to accelerate replacing the 18 bridges, said Leland Colvin, a Transportation Department deputy secretary.

The agency is shortening the time frame between the start of the projects and building the bridges, giving incentives to contractors to finish bridges as quickly as possible, Colvin said.

Richland County, hardest hit during the flooding, will get five new bridges — four in the Eastover and Lower Richland areas and one near Arcadia Lakes.

Newberry County will get four new bridges, including

three that will replace structurally deficient bridges.

State Sen. Ronnie Cromer, R-Newberry, said he is happy the bridges will be replaced. However, his constituents are being inconvenienced while the roads are closed.

The state's roads agency says it is working to restore convenience as quickly as possible.

"Mobility was cut off as an effect of the storm," Colvin said. "We're trying to increase that mobility and that connectivity of the state's system."

'Long-term fix'

A total of 221 bridges were affected in some way by the flooding. About half — 105 — required some type of repair after the storm.

Forty-three bridges impacted by the storm were structurally deficient, and 32 of those will be repaired back to that substandard level.

Replacing the 32 structurally deficient bridges damaged in October's flooding would cost \$55 million, the state's interim roads chief told a state Senate panel recently.

To get all South Carolina bridges in good condition, it would take at least an additional \$1.8 billion during the next 25 years, according to the Transportation Department.

"We've got a highway infrastructure issue that this state, in my opinion, has to address," said state Senate President Pro Tempore Hugh Leatherman, R-Florence.

The Senate will be tasked

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with addressing the issue when senators return to Columbia in January.

Leatherman said sending money to the Transportation Department in dribs and drabs — or using state budget surpluses and revenues to pay for road repairs, as some gas-tax opponents have suggested — will not solve the problem.

That's because the roads agency has to know the amount of money that it will have in advance so it can plan road projects that can take years to design and complete, he said.

Cromer said while he typically is opposed to raising taxes, the condition of South Carolina roads is so bad that they must be improved.

Cromer expects lawmakers to agree to spend more on roads. Most likely, he said, legislators will agree to increase the gas tax, use some added state revenues on roads and pass an income tax cut, a priority of Gov. Nikki Haley, who could veto a proposal that she does not like.

Jackson and other Democrats oppose an income tax cut, saying the state has more pressing needs, including spending more on education.

Title: **Groups that place refugees getting federal money**

Author:

Size: 10.85 square inch

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Groups that place refugees getting federal money

Your recent article about the letter from certain state religious leaders to Gov. Nikki Haley regarding Syrian refugee resettlement does your readers a disservice by omitting some salient facts.

The article mentions that two organizations in this state are approved to help refugees relocate, but it doesn't name them or explain that they are well paid by the federal government to do so. In 2012 (the last year for which data is available), those organizations, World Relief and Lutheran Services, received \$39 million and \$42 million, respectively, in government payments, according to Refugee Resettlement Watch. One can only expect that those figures have grown even larger in recent years. This is big business. They have a direct and substantial pecuniary interest in maximizing the number of refugees they can resettle. How much of their advocacy is inspired by true humanitarian concerns and how much is driven by dollars? Only they can answer.

But the first step is always to follow the money.

Laird Minor
Simpsonville


 Title: **This is the year for gas tax hike**

Author:

Size: 35.65 square inch

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THE GREENVILLE NEWS EDITORIAL

This is the year for gas tax hike

It has been 28 years since South Carolina last raised its 16.75-cents-per-gallon gasoline tax. Last week, a Winthrop University poll showed 61 percent of state Republicans favor an increase in the gas tax if the money goes to repair roads and infrastructure.

It looks like the time may be right for the state Legislature to finally approve a gasoline tax increase to help overcome a massive deficit in state highway funding. And it should do so in strong enough numbers to overcome a promised veto from Gov. Nikki Haley.

Some put the funding deficit at \$1.5 billion a year. Although it's likely less than that, the deficit surely exceeds \$750 million a year.

The House has taken the first step to bridging that gap, last year passing a bill that would raise the gas tax by 10 cents a gallon and raise the sales tax cap on vehicles to \$500 from \$300. A Senate bill that was discussed last year would go a step further, raising gasoline taxes by 12 cents without a corresponding income tax cut.

A gasoline tax increase on its own will not completely bridge the road-funding deficit. But a tax increase does need to be a component of a comprehensive

roads bill. Those in the Legislature who support an increase need to make the case to their colleagues. And all South Carolinians who support such a step need to reach out to their representatives and tell them it's more than OK to raise the tax, it's the right thing to do.

The House bill only would generate roughly half of what's needed on an annual basis to get the majority of the state's roads in good condition, according to a recent report in *The Greenville News*. The Senate proposal from last year goes much further, and would provide about \$800 million annually.

The main obstacle to passing a gas tax, and even perhaps a comprehensive road funding bill, ironically could be a \$1.2 billion state revenue surplus. There will undoubtedly be a strong push by some lawmakers to use at least a portion of that money to meet infrastructure needs this year and kick the comprehensive bill down the road once more.

Republican Sen. Tom Corbin, for instance, said at a recent Upstate Chamber of Commerce meeting he opposes a gas tax and the road funding money should come out of that surplus. His constituents, he said, "want to see the waste in government cut first and the money prioritized."

Corbin is right on one point: South Carolina needs to be careful not to waste the relatively meager amount of funding it sends to its highway system, and money could always be spent more wisely. But the state's gasoline tax is among the lowest in the nation, and the majority of its roads are in poor condition.

The state's infrastructure needs are serious enough that a portion of that \$1.2 billion should indeed go to road funding. But that should not be done instead of a comprehensive bill, but rather in addition to one.

The state's roads are important to the economic well-being of South Carolina and to the quality of life state residents enjoy. But if roads are not brought into better condition, employers will take notice, and drivers will be less safe. In fact, some business leaders have said they might find it more attractive to move out of state if South Carolina does not address its infrastructure needs.

This is the year for South Carolina to finally pass a comprehensive road funding plan that increases available revenue. The Senate needs to follow up on the House's work and pass this meaningful reform without stripping away one of the most needed components.

Title: **Area chef involved in state program**
 Author: BY STEPHANIE TURNER sturner@aikenstandard.com
 Size: 34.1 square inch
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Area chef involved in state program

BY STEPHANIE TURNER

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Executive chef Brandon Velie uses fresh, local produce while cooking at Juniper restaurant in Ridge Spring, which he runs with his wife Jeanne. A couple of years ago, he started thinking about



Velie

how he could help promote using local produce while bringing attention to South Carolina.

One night, Gov. Nikki Haley visited the Ridge Spring restaurant, and Velie took the chance to run his idea by the politician.

Haley approved

of the idea, and the South Carolina Chef Ambassador program was created.

The first four chef ambassadors were announced in June 2014, with Velie chosen to represent the Midlands region.

“Each year, four chefs are selected to serve as the state’s culinary ambassadors. These chefs embody the best of South Carolina’s food scene, both in the quality of their provisions, as well as their dedication to using healthy, locally-grown ingredients,” as stated in a press release. “Throughout the year, the chef ambassadors will participate in a number of culinary and tourism specific events throughout the Southeast, hosting cooking demonstrations, conducting

educational seminars and discussing the offerings found in the cities in which their establishments are based.”

On Dec. 8, the 2016 chef ambassadors were announced. They are Teryi Youngblood of Passerelle Bistro in Greenville, Ramone Dickerson of 2 Fat 2 Fly and Wing City in Columbia, Orchid Paulmeier of One Hot Mama’s in Hilton Head and Forrest Parker of Old Village Post House in Mount Pleasant.

Velie will serve as the adviser to the 2016 chefs.

“I’m basically the go-to person for the ambassadors,” Velie said.

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CHEF

CONTINUED from 1C

The 2015 ambassadors were able to recommend a chef from his or her region, but Haley had the final say.

Velie recommended Dickerson.

“He’s a good guy and a really good chef,” Velie said.

Dickerson and his business partner Corey Simmons have

the “2 Fat to Fly” reality show on the Oprah Winfrey Network, or OWN, and are known for stuffing their chicken wings with items such as collard greens, rice and macaroni and cheese.

“The unique and delicious dishes these talented individuals provide at their restaurants are a perfect sam-

pling of the diverse culinary offerings found throughout South Carolina,” Haley said in a release. “I’m thrilled and honored to call these chefs our 2016 South Carolina Chef Ambassadors.”

The program operates in conjunction with Haley, as well as the S.C. Department of Agriculture and the S.C. Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism.

Juniper, 640 E Main St., Ridge Spring, is open Mondays and Tuesdays from 11 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., Thursdays to Saturdays from 11 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. and from 6 to 9 p.m. and Sundays from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

For more information, call 803-685-7547 or visit the Juniper Facebook page.

For more information on the program, visit agriculture.sc.gov.

Title: **Leaders discuss MOX penalty money**
 Author: BY DERREK ASBERRY dasberry@aikenstandard.com
 Size: 45.88 square inch
 Aiken, SC Circulation: 19635



Leaders discuss MOX penalty money

Uncertainty
looms after
Haley's call to
impose fines

BY DERREK ASBERRY
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A Charleston Republican wants any MOX penalty money South Carolina collects from the Department of Energy to go toward the state's roads and bridges.

However, it is still unclear whether the Department of Energy will even pay the agreed upon \$1 million a day beginning Jan. 1, 2016 — the date either 1 metric

ton of weapons-grade plutonium

is supposed to leave the Savannah River Site or be processed through the site's incomplete Mixed Oxide Fuel Fabrication Facility.

S.C. Rep. Chip Limehouse prefiled legislation Dec. 3 requesting that all fines received related to plutonium storage at SRS be credited to the State Highway

Please see **MOX**, Page 14A

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MOX

CONTINUED from 1A

Fund and be used “exclusively for highway, road and bridge maintenance, construction and repair.”

The *Aiken Standard* made calls to Limehouse seeking comment, however, the calls were not returned before press time.

Regardless of whether Limehouse’s bill is successful, Aiken County will likely not be a direct beneficiary of the money, said County Administrator Clay Killian.

According to the 2003 agreement that requires DOE to pay up to \$100 million a year, the money “shall be paid to the State of South Carolina.” But the funding will only come if the money is available and if Congress chooses to appropriate, according to the agreement.

“There’s no provisions for that to come locally to Aiken,” Killian said. “If the money is collected, then we can inquire about getting some of it. But it’s my understanding that none of that money will directly come to us.”

Gov. Nikki Haley made headlines by sending a letter to U.S.

Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz on Monday informing him that the state will seek penalties outlined in the 2003 agreement signed by DOE and then Gov. Jim Hodges. Haley also threatened to sue if DOE refuses to pay.

An inquiry also was sent to the National Nuclear Security Administration, a semi-autonomous branch of the Energy Department and the overseer of the MOX project.

Press Secretary Francie Israeli said DOE does not comment on private correspondence to the

Secretary, but “the Department is working to meet its commitment to the State of South Carolina.”

Monday’s letter was lauded by U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., whose office said the State should pursue all options at its disposal.

U.S. Rep. Joe Wilson, R-S.C., also spoke highly of Haley’s decision Tuesday on the House floor.

Wilson said the MOX facility is about 70 percent complete, a number used by contractor CB&I MOX Services; however, DOE officials have denounced that figure, stating the facility is only about 40 percent complete.

The facility is expected to help meet a commitment with Russia by converting 34 metric tons of weapons-grade plutonium into commercial nuclear fuel.

Despite cost overruns and reports that suggest there are

cheaper options, Wilson said MOX should continue because it eliminates the need for a waste repository.

“The Department of Energy should commit to complete the program in its entirety as it promised the people of South Carolina, especially when considering the economic and environmental impact of storing the material,” Wilson said.

A congressionally mandated study from Aerospace Corp. reported in April that the life cycle cost of the MOX project is \$51 billion compared to a \$17 billion cost for a downblending alternative — the cheapest of five pathways studied by Aerospace. Downblending would dilute the plutonium and ship the solution to a repository.

High Bridge Associates, a company commissioned by the Board of Governors of CB&I-AREVA MOX Services, denounced the Aerospace report,



Limehouse

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EDITORIAL

Gov. Haley right to hold DOE to promises made

Gov. Nikki Haley took the right step Tuesday when she put the U.S. Department of Energy on notice that promises made to the Palmetto State on the disposition of plutonium at the Savannah River Site must be kept.

Haley wrote Secretary of Energy Ernest Moniz to inform him that she will pursue fines of \$1 million per day, up to \$100 million, due the state in 2016 as called for in a 2003 federal law requiring DOE to process or remove 1 ton of weapons-grade plutonium from the state by Jan. 1.

The promise of such payments were made when then-Gov. Jim Hodges opposed federal plans to bring 34 metric tons of the radioactive element to Aiken County for what was described as short-term storage. The plan was to mix the plutonium with commercial nuclear fuel through the MOX process. Delays in the construction of the MOX facility and funding cuts over the years make meeting the impending deadline all but impossible. DOE could load up 1 ton of the material and transport it elsewhere to avoid the fines, but no other state is likely to allow that to happen.

Over the last several years, the Obama administration has all but walked away from MOX as a strategy. That cannot be allowed to happen at this late date.

MOX is a major part of securing the future of SRS. The Site hasn't had an active reactor since 1988 and is solely focused on cleanup activities. Some 1,500 jobs are associated with the MOX facility.

Under a 2000 nuclear non-proliferation agreement with Russia, the Cold War era plutonium is to be reprocessed into commercial-grade

nuclear reactor fuel. Russia is also reprocessing 34 metric tons of plutonium.

Since work began on MOX in 2007, costs have reached nearly \$5 billion and it's only 70 percent complete. DOE expects the total cost of finishing the plant could approach \$12 billion.

The project, overseen by the DOE's National Nuclear Security Administration, has consistently failed to meet its milestones due to underfunding, DOE Secretary Moniz said. After touring SRS earlier this year, he said the project needs closer to \$1 billion a year for "decades," otherwise "it will never be finished."

"We are woefully short of the kind of resources that it will take to get this project done in a reasonable time," Moniz said in June. "The more time we go, the more it costs."

But Aerospace Corp., a nonprofit that operates a federally funded research and development center in California, reported in April that the project could cost as much as \$47.5 billion if funded properly.

Aerospace's report was one of three released this year looking at alternatives to the MOX site.

More alternative plans will follow, according to the recently approved annual defense appropriation that designates \$5 million of annual funding toward studying alternatives. Congress is expected to pass the omnibus spending bill soon.

Meanwhile, U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., and fellow South Carolina U.S. Sen. Tim Scott, R-S.C., along with U.S. Rep. Joe Wilson, R-S.C., disputed the nonprofit's skyrocketing estimate in a joint statement last spring.

"Having already spent \$4.4 billion on the project to achieve roughly 65 percent completion, we find it difficult to understand how com-

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pleting and operating the project will cost another \$47.5 billion,” they wrote.

The Aerospace report and a group of national laboratory nuclear scientists named the “Red Team” suggest diluting or “down-blending” the plutonium and storing it at a closed underground storage site in New Mexico. While less costly, the option presents multiple regulatory challenges.

MOX is the best option out there and it is

the one taxpayers have already spent billions pursuing. Federal foot dragging is about to get very expensive as the fines can and should start piling up in the new year.

DOE, get the process of removing the plutonium from South Carolina underway as quickly as possible. In the meantime, pay up and recognize the contribution South Carolina has made to national security for so little in return.