

STATEMENT ON LAMAR ALEXANDER'S CRAZY SPENDING AND HIS EVEN CRAZIER DEFENSE

Action organized by Oak Ridge Environmental Peace Alliance, orepa.org

Yesterday, April 16, 2018, Senator Lamar Alexander released his latest on-line newsletter, Latest from Lamar, Notes from the Senate Desk. Among other things, he addresses the runaway spending bill passed last month by the Republican led Congress.

Here's what the Senator said about the massive (14%) increase in spending on nuclear weapons programs that his subcommittee is responsible for. One of the big ticket items is the new nuclear bomb plant being built in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, the Uranium Processing Facility:

"We also examined the fiscal year 2019 budget request for the National Nuclear Security Administration. A key pillar of our national defense is a strong nuclear deterrent, so Congress must maintain a safe and effective nuclear weapons stockpile and keep big construction projects on time and on budget. I'm pleased to know the Department is continuing to maintain and modernize our nuclear weapons stockpile, including the Uranium Processing Facility (UPF) at the Y-12 National Security Complex in Oak Ridge, and has approved the design of the nuclear buildings for the UPF last month, which allows the contractor to begin construction.

"Those concerned, as I am, about the out-of-control federal debt should know that this spending on research and modernizing our nuclear weapons is not part of the budget that is driving the federal debt. The part of the budget that funds our national defense and national labs – called discretionary spending – makes up only 30 percent of the budget and is growing slightly above the rate of inflation. The federal debt problem, which is a real problem, is caused by runaway mandatory spending, which makes up 63 percent of federal spending and is bankrupting our country. The federal debt is not the result of Congress overspending on science and energy research each year."

Senator Alexander is asking Tennessee taxpayers to believe him instead of their eyes and their common sense. Of course the increases in nuclear weapons programs (while most other discretionary programs are taking budget cuts) are driving up the deficit.

What are taxpayers to make of such blatant disingenuousness? Is the Senator playing us for fools? Or has he lived in the Washington, DC, bubble so long that he actually believes this tommyrot?

Neither of those options is comforting or acceptable to taxpayers.

The Senator cannot have it both ways. Either the spending on the UPF bomb plant boondoggle is justified—the 10-year-old project, plagued by mismanagement and lack of oversight, has spent \$3 billion dollars even before officially starting construction!—or it is not.

If it is justified, he should show us the numbers and make the case. He has refused to do either. Pressed repeatedly, he simply declares all is well.

If the UPF is not justified, Alexander should issue a mea culpa and cut off funding for the bloated bomb plant, tell the National Nuclear Security Administration to propose a plan that actually fits the mission need, and start over.

But Alexander's plan is to continue with smoke and mirrors, issue declarations that fly in the face of reason, and, most importantly, continue to shovel hundreds of millions of dollars a year to Consolidated Nuclear Services and Bechtel.

Tennesseans work hard for their money, and most of us pay our taxes honestly. We deserve honesty from the people in Washington, DC who spend those dollars. And we deserve to have them spent on things we really need—protection for the environment, health care, education, and other programs that will make our state and the people who live here stronger.

Today, on Tax Day, we conducted an unscientific, random poll* of people on Market Square in downtown Knoxville. We asked people to “vote” on where they wanted their tax money spent. We gave them four options: Health Care, Environment, Education, and the UPF Bomb Plant. The results were enlightening, and should be of interest to Senator Alexander.

Of those who voted, 0% chose the UPF Bomb Plant. The rest, 100%, voted for one of the three “social needs” options. In dollar terms, it looked like this:

Environment: \$ 77,500
Education: \$ 106,500
Health Care \$ 40,000
UPF Bomb Plant \$ 0

The Tax Day Rally and poll were conducted by members of the Oak Ridge Environmental Peace Alliance.

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* The poll was random and unscientific. Passersby were given a packet of “tax dollars” ranging from \$3,500 to \$12,000 and asked to choose one priority for spending. Participants were self-selecting—they could simply decline to participate—from among the people who happened to be on Market Square in the noon hour on Tuesday, April 17. The distribution of tax dollar packets was also random—whatever was drawn from the bag. The different amounts represent the typical federal tax burden on Tennessee households at differing income levels.