United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 26, 2012

The Honorable Steven Chu
Secretary
U.S. Department of Energy
1000 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20585

Dear Secretary Chu:

We are writing to express our concern with the National Nuclear Security Administration's decision to delay construction of CMRR-NF. The existing CMR facility, where the bulk of our analytical chemistry and materials characterization work is done, is 60 years old and functionally obsolete. It sits on a known fault and will be closed in 2019. Plans to replace the CMR began over ten years ago and the first phase, the Radiation Laboratory Utility Office Building, will be completed later this year. Planning and review for a second phase, the replacement nuclear facility (CMRR-NF) started in 2004.

Now the administration has proposed to delay for five years the work necessary to construct that facility. The reason cited for this decision is the projected cost of the replacement facility which unfortunately has grown to between $3.7 and $5.8 billion. In our view, this five year delay will have at least three adverse consequences.

- First, it will adversely impact our nation's scientific capabilities, especially in analytical chemistry and materials characterization that are central to assuring the safety, reliability and performance of the nuclear deterrent.
- Second, as both the current and former lab directors have testified, further delay will likely result in further cost escalation in the ultimate construction of the required replacement facility.
- Third, the NNSA's proposed alternative is a high risk option, which may not meet national security requirements for stockpile stewardship, and which will likely take 10 years to implement and cost an additional $800 million.

Rather than delaying work on a replacement facility for the planned five years, we believe the administration should present a more specific alternative plan and make the necessary preparation to properly design and implement it. Until there is a feasible alternative, the least risk option is to continue pursuing a replacement facility. In order to meet cost restrictions, we believe changes in the planned facility could reduce its price tag significantly, without compromising safety, while allowing us to still meet our commitments under the New Start Treaty and the 2010 MOU between DoD and DoE.

Our national labs are premier facilities, with scientists and engineers who deserve to work in an environment where not only their work is appreciated, but their safety is not at risk because of funding decisions made in Washington DC. We look forward to working with you on this issue as well the need to adequately fund the national laboratories to compete for other vital mission areas such as non-proliferation and energy security.

Sincerely,

Jeff Bingaman
United States Senator

Tom Udall
United States Senator

CC: Dr. Ashton Carter, Deputy Secretary of Defense
Dr. Frank Kendall, Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics
Dr. James Miller, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy
Admiral James Winnefeld, Jr., Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
General Robert Kehler, Commander, U.S. STRATCOM
Mr. Thomas D'Agostino, Administrator, National Nuclear Security Administration