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**Title:** Feds Outline Plan to Safeguard Nukes

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## Feds Outline Plan to Safeguard Nukes

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WASHINGTON (AP) -- The Bush administration will accelerate efforts to keep nuclear material from terrorists, especially in helping Russia safeguard its nuclear stocks, Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham said Friday.

Abraham said that a yearlong review of the government's nuclear nonproliferation programs has made clear that the threat of nuclear materials getting into the wrong hands is greater today than ever.

The attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on Sept. 11 ``put an enormous exclamation point" on the need to protect nuclear materials and spend more money on nuclear nonproliferation, especially in Russia, said Abraham.

``I don't believe I have any higher priority," Abraham said in remarks prepared for a speech Friday to the Los Angeles World Affairs Council.

Earlier this week, the administration proposed, as part of its fiscal 2003 budget, spending nearly \$1.2 billion for Energy Department nuclear nonproliferation programs, a 50 percent increase over what Congress originally approved for this year.

After the Sept. 11 attacks, Congress tacked on another \$226 million for nuclear material protection, bringing the amount to just over \$1 billion for this year.

``This is a major reversal and it's a welcomed one," said William Hoehn, director of the Russia-American Nuclear Advisory Council, a private advocacy group on security issues involving the two nations.

Only a year ago, the Bush administration proposed slashing the same programs by \$100 million, prompting outcries from nuclear nonproliferation advocacy groups.

Congress rejected most of those cuts.

In his remarks, Abraham said that his department will accelerate the program to help Russia improve the security at its nuclear weapons material sites and consolidate nuclear stockpiles.

``This is where the rubber meets the road and the results speak for themselves," said Abraham, adding that the security improvements are now expected to be completed by 2008, two years ahead of schedule.

He also singled out expanding a U.S.-Russia program to help former nuclear scientists and engineers find civilian, commercial jobs or use their expertise in anti-terrorism programs.

The goal of the program is to eventually provide civilian jobs for more than 30,000 Russian weapons scientists, engineers and technicians.

“By employing these scientists for peaceful, viably commercial purposes, we dramatically reduce the talent pool available to those states that would employ these individuals for their own evil ends," said Abraham.

The administration had not always thought that way. A year ago, it proposed virtually eliminating the program to help scientists who once worked on nuclear weapons jobs, maintaining the program was not working well.

Abraham also cited the administration's agreement with Russia to dispose of 34 tons of excess plutonium in each country. He recently announced a plan to process the plutonium into mixed oxide for use in commercial power reactors. Russia will do the same to its plutonium.

In embracing more help for Russia, Abraham said, “We have not undertaken these programs out of charity. They are clearly in our national interest."

“The theft of only a very small quantity of highly enriched uranium or plutonium ... would be enough for a crude but utterly devastating nuclear weapon," said Abraham.

Since the early 1990s there have been almost 200 documented attempts to acquire nuclear materials, he said, and today the threat “is frankly more harrowing than it was a decade ago."

A year ago, a bipartisan commission called the need to help Russia protect its nuclear material one of the top U.S. national security priorities. The panel, headed by former GOP Sen. Howard Baker of Tennessee and Lloyd Cutler, former White House counsel in the Clinton administration, said \$30 billion over 10 years would be needed to do the job right.

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