United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 5, 2012

The Honorable Steven Chu
Secretary
Room 7A-257
U.S. Department of Energy
1000 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20585-1000

The Honorable Jeffrey D. Zients
Acting Director
Office of Management and Budget
Eisenhower Executive Office Building
1650 Pennsylvania Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20503

Dear Secretary Chu and Director Zients:

As you work to finalize the Department of Energy's budget request for fiscal year 2014, we urge you to ensure the request is sufficient to maintain current levels of operations at the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant. We believe the minimum level of funding needed to operate and maintain the plant in 2014 is $222 million.

The Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) is the only operating facility in the United States that is actively disposing of defense-generated transuranic (TRU) waste. Over the past 12 years, WIPP has received and safely disposed of over 80,000 cubic meters of defense TRU waste. We believe WIPP should have sufficient funding in 2014 to continue to meet its cleanup mission, preserve a high level of safety and compliance and properly maintain vital aging plant infrastructure.

In addition to the base funding of $222 million, we understand there is currently a substantial backlog in equipment and maintenance projects needed to continue safe operations and ask you to request an additional $7 million to address it. Also, we believe WIPP would be a logical location for any generic thermal testing of potential salt repositories in the U.S. and worldwide, as part of DOE's efforts to identify options to dispose of nuclear waste pursuant to the Blue Ribbon Commission's report. DOE's Carlsbad Field Office has proposed such testing and indicates an additional $7 million for WIPP in 2014 would be needed to support a program, which would have a significant impact in retaining qualified workers at WIPP. We respectfully request the Administration consider this proposal as part of an overall scientific effort to investigate various repository media in 2014.

We appreciate the budget pressure the Department is facing for this and future years, but believe the Department of Energy must request sufficient funding in 2014 to continue to operate WIPP and meet the deadlines for permanent disposal of transuranic waste from throughout the DOE complex. Thank you for your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,

Jeff Bingaman
United States Senator

Tom Udall
United States Senator