

THE WORLD'S NUCLEAR NEWS AGENCY

1 February 2003 / News N°57 / 03 / A



## US Returns to ITER – China's Role in Project Confirmed

**President George Bush has announced that the US is rejoining the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER) project.**

Mr Bush said: "The commercialisation of fusion has the potential to dramatically improve America's energy security while significantly reducing air pollution and emissions of greenhouse gases."

His announcement follows last year's recommendation from the US Department of Energy's (DOE) Fusion Energy Sciences Advisory Committee (FESAC) – endorsing a return to the project [see News No. 297, 17th September].

In a statement issued on Thursday, US energy secretary Spencer Abraham also confirmed that China had officially joined ITER negotiations – a move indicated in a NucNet report earlier this month [see News No. 18, 13th January].

Mr Abraham, who was visiting the DOE's Princeton Plasma Physics Laboratory, said: "Over the lifetime of a child born today, the demand for energy will more than triple from what it is today. Most of that growth will take place in the developing world. If fusion power proves practical, it will kick in at the right time. It will be there to meet the increasing need for large-scale sources of clean energy around the world.

"Today's decision is a logical extension of the President's National Energy Policy, which called on the DOE to develop next-generation technology – including fusion. But let me be clear, our decision to join ITER in no way means a lesser role for the fusion programmes we undertake here at home. It is imperative that we maintain and enhance our strong domestic research programme – at Princeton, at the universities and at our other labs. Critical science needs to be done in the US, in parallel with ITER, to strengthen our competitive position in fusion technology."

The future of ITER appeared in doubt in July 1998 when an agreement between the EU, Japan, Russia and the US came up for renewal. No firm US financial commitment to continue with the project was given at the time, although the government later pledged support to help keep the project on track into the following year [see News No. 344, 23rd September 1998], after which the US left the project.

Mr Abraham said the current estimated construction cost for ITER, including buildings, hardware, installation and personnel was "around USD 5 billion in constant 2002 dollars". He said the US share of the construction cost was expected to be about 10% of the total, with construction possibly starting in 2006 (although a site has yet to be selected). He said ITER could be operational in 2014.

*Earlier in the week, during the State of the Union Address, Mr Bush announced a USD 1.2 billion 'Freedom Fuel Initiative' to develop research funding for the development of hydrogen-powered vehicles. He said: " With a new national commitment, our scientists and engineers will overcome obstacles to taking these cars from laboratory to showroom, so that the first car driven by a child born today could be powered by hydrogen, and pollution-free."*

Source: DOE / White House

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