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## U.S. to Participate in Fusion Project

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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PLAINSBORO, N.J. (AP) -- The United States plans to jump back into a long-range international collaboration to develop fusion energy as a commercial power source, U.S. Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham said Thursday.

Abraham made the announcement during a visit to the country's premier fusion research lab here.

The director of the Princeton Plasma Physics Laboratory, Robert Goldston, and officials from the Department of Energy will travel to Russia on Feb. 19 to begin negotiations with other members of the collaboration, Abraham said.

Japan, Canada, the European Union, the Russian Federation, China and now the United States plan to build a \$5 billion fusion reactor, called the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor, or ITER.

The project's goal is to prove the technical feasibility of fusion energy. It should put scientists one step away from a demonstration fusion power plant, which physicists believe could be achieved in 35 years.

Fusion power produces no greenhouse gas emissions and only low levels of radioactive waste, and uses an abundant source of fuel -- hydrogen.

Fusion, the process that powers the sun and stars, involves slamming very small atoms such as forms of hydrogen together at extremely high temperatures and pressure inside a reactor. When the atoms fuse, or bond, they release energy that could be captured and turned into electricity.

Abraham said that under President Bush's National Energy Policy, other fusion research projects -- at Princeton, other universities and DOE labs -- will get higher priority. He would not specify how much new funding Bush will seek, saying he will do so when announcing his department's proposed budget Monday.

The international collaboration, first proposed more than a decade ago, stalled amid concerns about financing and reactor design. The United States was part of the original collaboration but backed out about five years ago.

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On the Net:

Princeton laboratory: <http://www.pppl.gov/>Department of Energy: <http://www.energy.gov/>

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