WASHINGTON – Michigan State University’s Facility for Rare Isotope Beams would receive the full $90 million requested for continued construction under a spending bill Congress hopes to pass this week to keep the federal government running.

“We’re really thrilled that the project remains on track,” said Mark Burnham, MSU’s vice president for governmental affairs.

Before leaving for the year, lawmakers have to finish setting funding levels for the government for the fiscal year that began in October.

The Energy Department, which is funding most of the project, had asked Congress for $90 million for the current phase of construction. That’s up from the $55 million approved last year.

Both the House and Senate panels that set the Energy Department’s budget had backed the request, but lawmakers did not pass full versions of the 2015 spending bills before the fiscal year started so are playing catchup.

Burnham said the delay has not been a problem for construction, which is eight weeks ahead of schedule.

“That can always be affected by everything from funding to weather,” he said.

Workers recently poured 2,700 square feet of concrete for the $730 million, 227,000-square-foot nuclear physics research facility.

All work is supposed to be completed by 2022, but MSU hopes everything will be finished by 2020.

The facility will contain a superconducting linear accelerator able to accelerate beams of heavy ions to more than half the speed of light.

Research that will be done at the facility will expand understanding of the origins of the stars and planets, advance medical technologies and strengthen research related to defense and the life sciences. It’s expected to increase the number of isotopes with known properties from about 2,000 to more than 5,000.

Burnham said MSU is especially grateful for the support the project has gotten from members of the delegation who are retiring, including Sen. Carl Levin, D-Mich., and GOP Rep. Mike Rogers, whose district includes East Lansing.

Despite the significant turnover in the delegation for the next Congress, Burnham said he believes the facility has the support of Michigan’s lawmakers and the Energy Department as it reaches a critical point in the construction phase.

“While I’m certain that there will be additional challenges going forward over the next few years,” he said, “we’ll continue to work to make sure that the project stays on track.”

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