

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 1, 2018

The Honorable John McCain
Chairman
Senate Armed Services Committee
Russell Senate Building, Room 228
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jack Reed
Ranking Member
Senate Armed Services Committee
Russell Senate Building, Room 228
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman McCain and Ranking Member Reed:

As the Armed Services Committee begins to develop the FY2019 National Defense Authorization Act, we write to urge the Committee to closely scrutinize the military requirements and cost of developing a “low-yield” warhead for the submarine-launched ballistic missile and of retaining indefinitely the last U.S. megaton class nuclear weapon, the B83 gravity bomb.

As you know, in ratifying the New START Treaty, the Senate committed on a bipartisan basis to making substantial, multi-year investments to ensure that the U.S nuclear arsenal remains safe, secure, and reliable for decades to come. This recapitalization program by itself has become extremely costly: the Congressional Budget Office has concluded that current plans to update, sustain, and operate the nuclear triad will cost up to \$1.7 trillion with inflation over the coming 30 years.¹

Many in Congress believe that these nuclear modernization efforts are beyond what the United States needs to maintain deterrence, but have nonetheless worked collaboratively to ensure that the United States has a nuclear arsenal that ably meets its sole purpose: to deter nuclear attack against the United States, our allies, and our partners.

However, the Trump administration’s Nuclear Posture Review outlines policies that will dangerously strain the financial, logistical, and personnel resources focused on the existing nuclear modernization effort. Specifically, the NPR’s proposal to develop a low-yield submarine-launched ballistic missile variant and retain the B83 gravity bomb do not appear to be driven by military requirements. Further, the rush by the administration to authorize and fund these systems gives Congress insufficient time to assess the reliability of the limited cost estimates the Administration has provided for these systems.

With regard to the B83, in 2014, the Secretaries of Energy and Defense, along with the head of the Nuclear Weapons Council, agreed to phase out the B83, stating that “Fielding the B61-12 enables the retirement of the B83-1 bomb...” Congress proceeded with funding for the B61-12 based on this policy decision. Retention of the B83 indefinitely after deployment of the B61-12 therefore represents a major change in policy and the reversal of a previous agreement with Congress. Yet the Nuclear Posture Review devotes no attention to the rationale.

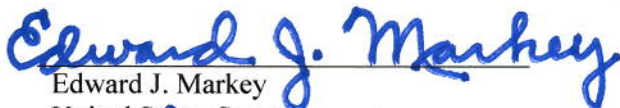
¹ <https://www.cbo.gov/system/files/115th-congress-2017-2018/reports/53211-nuclearforces.pdf>

Therefore, we urge the Committee to evaluate the military requirement behind these systems and to obtain independent cost estimates for each before authorizing these decisions.

Additionally, we strongly urge the Senate Armed Services Committee to consider the adverse impacts that pursuing new weapons could have on other defense priorities and existing nuclear modernization efforts. New missions will undoubtedly further strain our armed forces as well as the Department of Energy's National Nuclear Security Administration, which is at present working beyond its nominal capacity.

The Committee must carefully scrutinize the Defense and Energy Department's requests. Thank you and we look forward to working with you to ensure our nation has the nuclear deterrent it requires.

Sincerely,



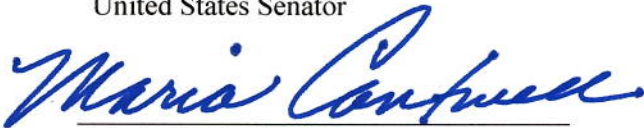
Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



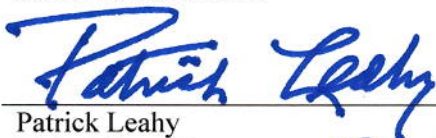
Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



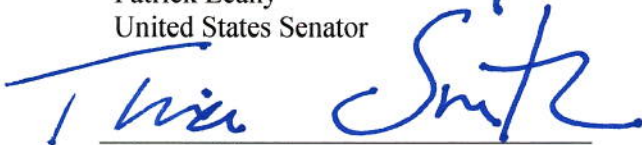
Bernard Sanders
United States Senator



Maria Cantwell
United States Senator



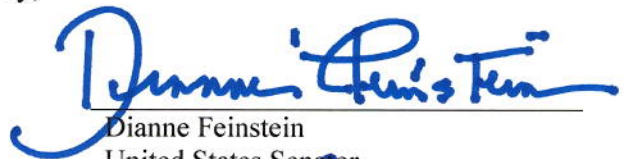
Patrick Leahy
United States Senator



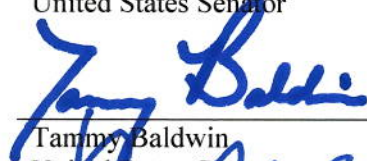
Tina Smith
United States Senator



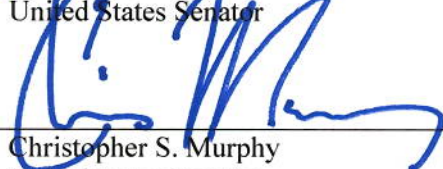
Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



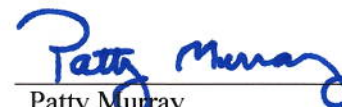
Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator



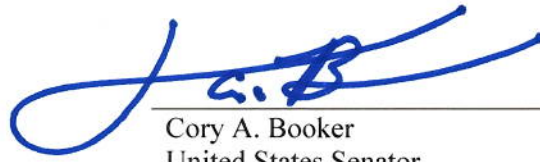
Patty Murray
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



Brian Schatz
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker
United States Senator