

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 20, 2016

The Honorable Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

During your recent historic visit to Hiroshima, you called on nations that possess nuclear weapons to “have the courage to escape the logic of fear and pursue a world without them.” While you acknowledged that we may not realize this vision in our lifetimes, you stated that “persistent effort can roll back the possibility of catastrophe.” We agree, and we applaud your visit.

In light of reports that you are conducting a comprehensive review of U.S. nuclear policy, we write to encourage you to take bold action in your final months in office to restrain U.S. nuclear weapons spending and reduce the risk of nuclear war. Among the steps we urge you to consider are scaling back excessive nuclear modernization plans, adopting a policy of no-first-use of nuclear weapons, and canceling launch-on-warning plans. All of these options would bolster U.S. national security and advance the commitment you made in 2009 in Prague to “reduce the role of nuclear weapons in our national security strategy.”

First and foremost, we urge you to scale back plans to construct unneeded new nuclear weapons and delivery systems. Independent estimates suggest that nuclear weapons sustainment and modernization plans could cost nearly one trillion dollars over the next 30 years, putting enormous pressure on our defense budget at a time when non-nuclear systems will also require major expenditures. In particular, we urge you to cancel plans to spend at least \$20 billion on a new nuclear air-launched cruise missile, the Long Range Standoff weapon, which would provide an unnecessary capability that could increase the risk of nuclear war.

Proponents of the current nuclear modernization plans contend that you committed to building new nuclear weapons as part of a deal for passage of the New START Treaty with Russia. However, these commitments were made in a different budget environment and at a time when the full costs of nuclear modernization were not yet known.

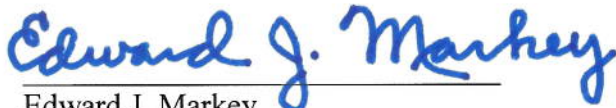
In addition to scaling back wasteful nuclear expenditures, we support reforms to U.S. nuclear posture. More than a quarter-century after the end of the Cold War, the United States still maintains the option of using nuclear weapons first in a conflict. Retaining this option exacerbates mutual fears of surprise attack, putting pressure on other nuclear-armed states to keep their arsenals on high-alert and increasing the risk of unintended nuclear war.

In light of our unmatched conventional military capabilities, we do not need to rely on the threat of nuclear first-use to deter non-nuclear attacks on our homeland or our allies. By adopting a policy of no-first-use of nuclear weapons, the United States could reduce the risk of accidental nuclear conflict while deterring both conventional and nuclear threats to our security.

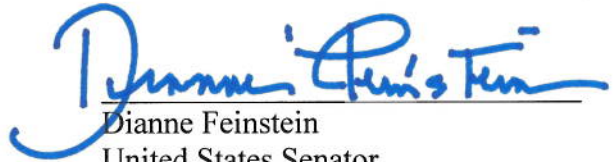
Finally, the United States currently maintains plans to launch nuclear weapons in response to the mere warning of a nuclear attack. This policy undermines the president's ability to carefully deliberate in a crisis, and raises the prospect of devastating mistakes in the event of false alarms. To further reduce the risk of inadvertent nuclear war, we support increasing the time available to the commander-in-chief to consider using nuclear weapons by canceling launch-on-warning plans.

Nuclear war poses the gravest risk to American national security. The lesson of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki is clear: nuclear weapons must never be used again. We must do everything we can to reduce the risk of nuclear war and preserve America's security interests.

Sincerely,



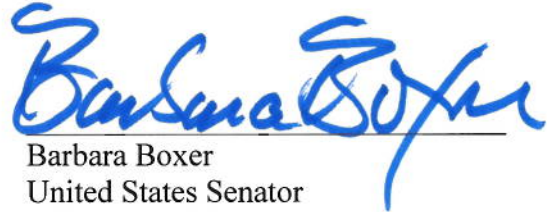
Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



Al Franken
United States Senator



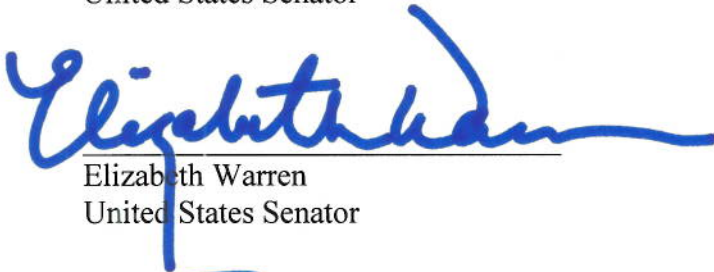
Barbara Boxer
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



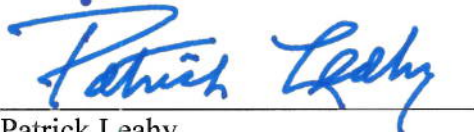
Bernard Sanders
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Sherrod Brown
United States Senator



Patrick Leahy
United States Senator



Ron Wyden
United States Senator