

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 20, 2019

The Honorable James M. Inhofe  
Chairman  
Committee on Armed Services  
228 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jack Reed  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Armed Services  
228 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Inhofe and Ranking Member Reed:

Thank you for your diligent efforts to complete the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020 (FY20 NDAA). As conference negotiations occur with the House, we respectfully urge you to support and maintain the following House provisions for inclusion in the final conference report.

## Low-Yield Nuclear Missiles

The House legislation prohibits the deployment of the W76-2 low-yield nuclear warhead for the Trident D5 submarine-launched ballistic missile. This warhead is a dangerous, costly, unnecessary, and redundant addition to the U.S. nuclear arsenal.

The W76-2 is a poorly conceived and ill-advised new nuclear weapon. For 60 years, our nuclear-armed submarines have provided a secure second strike capability. The sea-based leg of our nuclear triad is our most survivable deterrence asset, signaling that the United States is capable of responding to any nuclear attack with overwhelming force. By putting a “tactical” nuclear weapon on a Trident missile, we will be putting our most valuable strategic asset at risk. Every time we fire from one of these submarines, we risk disclosing its location to our enemies. These vessels, which we are beginning to replace at an estimated cost of nearly \$8 billion per boat, carry about 70% of our deployed deterrent. Why would we risk compromising the survivability of the most important part of our deterrent in order to launch a single low-yield warhead? Putting our literal last line of defense at risk due to a theory on tactical exchange that has not even been proven as a likely scenario is irresponsible.

Second, the W76-2 would reduce the threshold for nuclear use and make nuclear escalation more likely. It is designed to be a nuclear war-fighting weapon with a reduced yield that is intended to match the lower yield of some Russian nuclear systems. Supporters of this warhead argue this would make its use more credible. In other words, it is specifically intended to be a more useable nuclear weapon.

This argument is dangerous. First, the United States already has many nuclear weapons with low-yield options, including existing B61 variants and the Air-Launched Cruise Missile (ALCM). Those weapons are being replaced at enormous cost with the new, more capable B61-12 and the new, stealthy Long-Range Standoff Weapon (LRSO) nuclear-armed cruise missile. If

the United States ever needed to use a low-yield weapon, then the president would already have multiple choices that account for tens of billions of dollars of nuclear weapons spending.

Second, Russia would not know whether the incoming missile would have a low-yield or a high-yield weapon. They would likely have to assume the worst and respond with equal or greater force, further escalating any conflict. There is no reason to have confidence that use of a low-yield, submarine-delivered warhead would control any conflict.

### Nuclear Diplomacy and Arms Control

The House legislation expresses the sense of Congress that the United States should seek to extend the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START), now the last remaining arms control treaty in force between the world's two largest nuclear-armed powers. New START can be extended from February 2021 to February 2026, and the House bill endorses that step unless Russia is in material breach of the treaty or another arms control agreement with equal or more comprehensive limits and verification provisions supersedes it. The provision additionally requests reports that assess the implications of letting New START expire with nothing to replace it.

Not only does New START provide much needed nuclear stability, it also affords the United States with invaluable insight into Russia's nuclear arsenal. Transparency into the size, location, and disposition of Russian nuclear weapons guides U.S. military planning and modernization activities, and does so at far less cost than training other intelligence assets to observe Russia's strategic forces or maintaining extremely large nuclear forces designed for "worst case scenario" deterrence planning. Without New START, the intelligence community would have to divert intelligence assets to attempt to maintain the same level of insight into Russia's strategic forces.

Furthermore, extending the Treaty for another five years would provide a foundation for the Trump Administration to achieve its goal of negotiating more comprehensive follow-on arms control agreements. Negotiating further strategic arms control treaties without such a stable foundation will be considerably more difficult. Without New START, there would be no limits on U.S. and Russian strategic nuclear forces for the first time in nearly 50 years. The risk of unconstrained nuclear competition would grow.

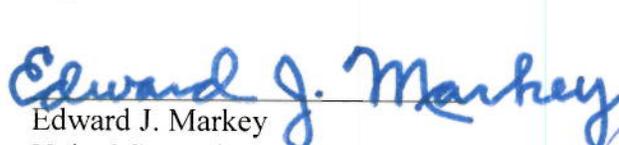
Finally, the House legislation also aims to prevent an arms race in the European or Asian theaters following the collapse of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty more than two weeks ago. The United States and its NATO allies can and must respond to Russia's violation of the INF Treaty, but we must do so in a way that does not contribute to a renewed arms race or drive a wedge in our existing alliances. The House bill sensibly denies funding for new INF-type missiles until pragmatic diplomatic and strategic planning steps are taken.

All three provisions should be retained. Thank you for your consideration of these requests that will strengthen our national defense.

Sincerely,

  
Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator

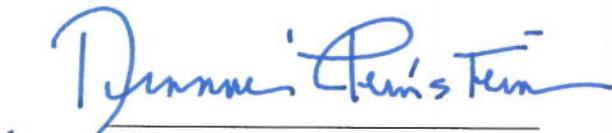
  
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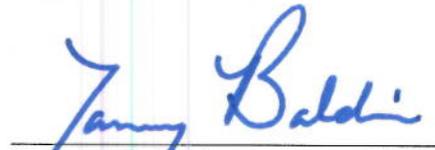
  
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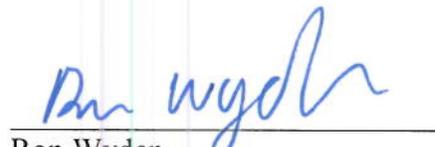
  
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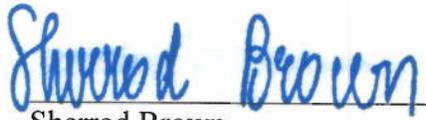
  
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Mazie K. Hirono  
United States Senator

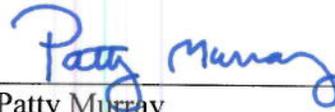
  
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Brian Schatz  
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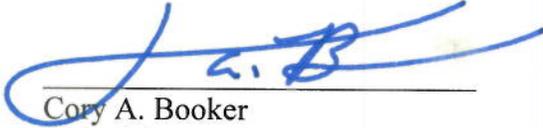
  
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United States Senator



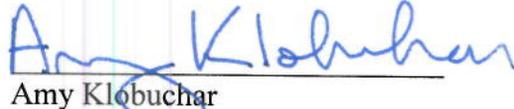
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