

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 25, 2016

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

Dear President Obama:

We appreciate your commitment to maintaining and modernizing our nation's nuclear triad so that it remains safe, reliable, and effective. We hope that your Administration will remain fully committed to this effort throughout your remaining time in office. As you are aware, every leg of the TRIAD plays a critical role in maintaining our nation's overall nuclear deterrence strategy. Today, we write to reiterate our strong support of the Ground Based Strategic Deterrent program, and to seek an assurance that the Administration will in no way delay that critical program from moving forward on schedule. Given the wide array of strategic challenges facing the United States, we believe that anything less could dramatically degrade the value of our nation's strategic deterrent, and could unnecessarily hinder our ability to protect this nation from the growing capabilities of our adversaries.

As you know, our ICBM fleet remains a critical cornerstone of our nation's nuclear triad. It provides a widely dispersed target set that complicates any adversary plan to threaten the United States, and it serves as an overwhelming barrier against any aspiring nuclear power mounting a nuclear challenge to our nation. For decades, the persistent deterrence and immediate response they provide has helped protect our nation and our allies from growing existential threats. There is no question that the effectiveness of that deterrent has always been rooted in its reliability, and its ability to stay ahead of the curve when it comes to the capabilities of our adversaries. That is why the 2010 Nuclear Posture Review recognized that an extensive analysis and follow-on program was necessary to ensure our ICBM force remains reliable and fully capable beyond 2030. As recently summarized by Defense Secretary Carter, "If we don't replace these systems, quite simply they will age even more and become unsafe, unreliable and ineffective."

This summer, the Air Force submitted to Congress a "Cost Comparison of Extending the Life of the Minuteman III Intercontinental Ballistic Missile to Replacing it with a Ground-Based Strategic Deterrent." In the final analysis, a determination to support a replacement system was made because a replacement GBSD capability would meet the requirements to maintain viability against current and future adversaries' capabilities. It would also help maintain the strategic missile industrial base, share component commonality with the Navy's ballistic missiles, and insert more reliable technology into the system.

Further, it was determined that “the costs to develop a new, more capable ICBM is less than the costs to extend the life of the existing MMIII capability” primarily because of lower long-term sustainment costs. We also note that based on this analysis, the Department of Defense earlier this year approved GBSD for Milestone A, a critical point of departure for the development and procurement of this weapons system.

Therefore, GBSD would not only provide the warfighter with a more capable weapons system to address both current and future threats, but it would also make sense from a taxpayer perspective. In contrast, to step away from GBSD and to rely solely upon a life extension of the existing Minuteman III capability would lead to a policy of spending more and more taxpayer dollars to maintain a capability that is only viable against current technologies. We find such a strategy completely unacceptable and in direct contrast to our nation’s best long-term interests. It would come at a time when North Korea continues to develop the ability to strike the United States and our regional allies, and Russia, China and other potential adversaries are as determined as ever to advance their nuclear capabilities.

To ensure the United States retains a safe, reliable, and effective deterrent for the foreseeable future, there is an urgent and critical need to move forward on GBSD. Your previous support and commitment to modernizing our nuclear triad indicates that you agree. Moving forward, we hope we can continue counting on that same level of support. We look forward to your response and to continuing to work with you on this critical issue.

Sincerely,


JON TESTER
U.S. Senator


JOHN HOEVEN
U.S. Senator


HEIDI HEITKAMP
U.S. Senator


STEVE DAINES
U.S. Senator


MICHAEL ENZI
U.S. Senator


JOHN BARRASSO
U.S. Senator