



# AIR FORCE ASSOCIATION

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September 23, 2021

The Honorable Adam Smith  
Chairman  
Committee on Armed Services  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2216 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mike Rogers  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Armed Services  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2216 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Smith and Ranking Member Rogers:

It has come to our attention, Representative John Garamendi has proposed an amendment to the House version of the Defense Authorization Bill which, if enacted, will end the development of the Ground Based Strategic Deterrent (GBSD) until 2031 by attempting a further life-extension program of the now 50-year-old Minuteman III (MMIII) Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) system. History has shown, conclusively, a modern, robust triad of nuclear forces is essential for maintaining strategic deterrence, especially during periods of “great power competition.” Therefore, to preserve the peace, the Air Force Association (AFA) strongly opposes this amendment.

But what are the thoughts of the American people? Recently, the AFA’s Mitchell Institute commissioned a poll on nuclear deterrence and shared the results with Congress. The poll, taken from 2,150 likely voters, reached three conclusions: Americans of both parties overwhelmingly agree that ensuring U.S. military superiority and investing in military spending directly contribute to Americans’ sense of safety and security. Second, Americans of both parties agree that modernizing our nuclear enterprise is critical to deterring foreign aggression and should be one of the highest priorities for the Department of Defense. Finally, and most importantly, once told that our ICBM force is 50 years old, American voters overwhelmingly support replacing those systems rather than refurbishing or eliminating them. Clearly, the American people support the concept and reasons for developing the GBSD.

Delaying the development of the GBSD will waste billions of dollars. It is our understanding the leadership of the House Armed Services Committee has stated a MMIII life extension program “...is actually more expensive than building the GBSD.” Specifically, it is estimated to cost \$38 billion more than developing and deploying the GBSD. According to the official Air Force cost studies, a MMIII life-extension program will cost \$23 billion in research and development and \$54 billion in procurement, for a total of \$77 billion. Even then, if the life

extension program is a complete success, the MMIII will only be available for an additional 14 years and at the end of its service these ICBMs will be 85 years old. That means the American people will have to pay \$7.7 billion per year for each of those 14 years. In sum, the amendment will cost the American taxpayers tens of billions of dollars more and provide a less capable system as the Russians and Chinese continue to modernize and expand their nuclear forces.

There is a better way. The GBSD program was initiated by the Obama Administration and President Biden's budget request asked for \$2.6 billion. The GBSD will be test flown before the end of 2023. The ICBM is expected to achieve Initial Operating Capability in 2029. The Congressional Research Service (CRS) has written:

In contrast with MMIII missiles, the GBSD employs a modular design and open architecture, allowing for the replacement of aging and outdated components. According to the Air Force, this modular approach would reduce the lifecycle cost of the GBSD and provide flexibility for improvements throughout the life of the weapon system.

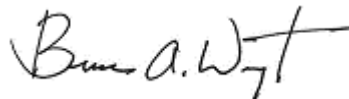
In addition, CRS states that the Air Force believes this modular approach will also increase the security of our ICBMs. Specifically, because of the GBSDs modular design the launcher door, which is directly above the ICBM, will now be able to be closed and secured during maintenance, whereas with the MMIII launcher door must be opened.

In conclusion, America's strategic deterrent requires a triad of nuclear forces. To maintain a robust and effective force, which the American people want and expect, the Air Force must proceed with the development and fielding of the GBSD. For that reason, the AFA strongly opposes this amendment.

Sincerely,



Gerald R. Murray, CMSAF, USAF (Ret)  
Chairman of the Board



Bruce "Orville" Wright, Lt Gen, USAF (Ret)  
President