

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, D. C.

June 7, 1957

THE WHITE HOUSE

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The President
The White House

Dear Mr. President:

We, the undersigned members of Congress, respectfully and urgently call on you to support five steps in the direction of survival in the face of the awesome peril arising from the development of nuclear weapons.

You have repeatedly pointed out the terrifying proportions of the present situation. "Humanity," you said in your September 19, 1956, broadcast, "has now achieved, for the first time in its history, the power to end its history.

Humanity's history may in fact end in the space of a few hours. Three nations have the means to end it. An accident could trip the mechanism of retaliation. A limited war could spiral out of control. The U.S.S.R. could coldly calculate that time is on the side of the free world and that it could win an all-out war even with its back broken by our counterattacks. X OF 225

We realize that these thoughts are not new to you, Mr. President. You recognize your duty and we recognize ours. We surely agree both on the magnitude and the imminence of the nuclear danger. Here indeed is a brink on which we and all the world teeter. Contemplating the abyss need only occupy a moment. Then our efforts must turn toward regaining our balance and moving to solid ground.

Our long term goal of arriving on this solid ground safely away from the nuclear abyss is of course a workable disarmament agreement and we are encouraged by the vigor of your policies in this area. But results here are too far in the future and today we do not dare rely solely on our enemy's fear of massive retaliation. Fear of mutual destruction is a flimsy basis for balance at the brink of the abyss. X OF 137-4

We most earnestly ask that you place your full official and personal weight behind the following five measures, all of which are in our opinion likely to aid in the survival of mankind, whether or not nuclear war comes.

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1. A National Radiation Institute of Health, with sufficient funds to conduct a large-scale research program.

There is apparently no scientific doubt that the world-wide radiation generated in an all-out war of H-bombs would be a hazard to life over the whole globe. Scientists also seem to be agreed that the testing of H-bombs involves at least a certain risk. The issue is over the immediacy of the radiation danger--that is, just how many tests the different nations may conduct before the cancer threshold is crossed. This must be measured against the contribution tests make to our military security.

Without now judging this question, however, we feel that the potential danger alone justifies a much greater effort to explore the possibilities for the treatment or, hopefully, prevention of radiation-induced cancer, leukemia, and cell degeneration.

2. Vigorous Reassertion of Your Support of an International Atomic Energy Agency.

We believe that the vast majority of the American people are fully behind your dramatic effort to develop peaceful uses of the atom through the United Nations. As Congressmen, we are anxious for the momentum behind these proposals to be sustained.

The exercise of your prestige and leadership will not only ensure the passage of the appropriate legislation. It will also present the proper image of the United States as a nation devoted to using the atom to build a better world.

3. A National Shelter Program.

The policy of mass evacuation, on which the United States planned to rely in a war of atom bombs, is now outmoded by the vastly more powerful H-bombs. A fifty megaton H-bomb can incinerate all life within a radius of 15 miles of the explosion. Within a few days the people who live in the downwind area of fallout will also sicken and die.

Under these circumstances, it appears prudent and imperative to provide some form of shelter for our people at the places where they live and work.

Our capacity to take a blow and keep on fighting is just as important as our ability to deliver one. An adequate system of shelters will therefore give pause to a potential aggressor and make a formidable contribution to our policy of deterrence.

4. Your Appointment of a Special Advisory Committee to the A.E.C. vested with authority to declassify data on radiation.

We recognize that secrecy about some kinds of data on radiation may be vital to our national security. On the other hand, official silence or even reassurances have on several occasions in the past been followed by contrary evidence from independent scientific sources-- for example, the Japanese physicists who analyzed the fallout from our Pacific tests.

Such incidents breed suspicion and an emotional approach toward the tests, making it difficult for the American people to reach a fair judgment. We are convinced that the public has the right to judge the issue for itself. Consistent with security, the people should be given the information they need to do so.

5. Increased Emphasis on Military Formations capable of fighting limited or brushfire engagements.

As you have cogently observed, concentration upon massive weapons in the fields of research and delivery can lead to a dead end in strategic thinking.

The enemy is too likely to calculate that we would permit him to retain a modest conquest rather than invoke a nuclear exchange. The only successful counter to this kind of limited attack is the capacity to meet the attack at the spot where it occurs.

To have this capacity we would need very flexible forces armed with both conventional and atomic weapons. We would also need many more troop-carrying airplanes than we now have on hand.

* * * *

We as members of Congress want to do our part in averting the suicide of the human race. Each of us whose name is signed below believes that this issue transcends partisanship. We respectfully request your personal attention to these proposals and stand ready to provide additional information.

Sincerely,

