

United States Senate

May 16th, 2019

The Honorable Patrick M. Shanahan
Acting Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1400

Dear Acting Secretary Shanahan,

We write to express our deep concerns with recent Department of Defense (DoD) actions that would directly undermine the ability of the United States Air Force to keep this nation safe today and into the future.

Most recently, as part of the May 10th DoD reprogramming notification, you informed Congress that \$24.3 million dollars would be redirected from critical Minuteman III Launch Control Center modernization efforts in order to pay for the construction of permanent barriers along the southern border. This notification was made the day after you testified before the Senate Appropriations Committee, a seemingly opportune time for you to justify such a decision with the Members of Congress who helped secure that \$24.3 million in Fiscal Year (FY) 2019.

Make no mistake about it - we have serious concerns that the actions taken by DoD are inconsistent with the national security priorities outlined in the National Defense Strategy. Furthermore, given the state of our nation's aging nuclear deterrent, and confronted by the growing threat of advanced Russian and Chinese nuclear capabilities, it seems inconceivable that DoD would choose a path in which we would increasingly rely upon the weapons and equipment of yesterday to fight the conflicts of tomorrow.

Given that the FY 2019 appropriation for the Minuteman III Launch Control Block Upgrades (LCCBU) program was \$24.3 million dollars, DoD's recent reprogramming equates to a complete gutting of this program - pushing it into the future year's budget. As you may know, the LCCBU is made up of numerous pieces of equipment, including the Joint Memory Loader (JML) and the Floppy Disk Drive (FDD), which uses eight-inch floppy disks designed in 1967. These antiquated floppy disks are used to upload authorized mission data, and to upload data logs of every event that takes place. Another delay in replacing these systems is one step closer to a critical mission failure.

Additionally, the LCCBU includes a blast-hardened printer called the Weapon System Control Console Printer (WSCCP), an Oxygen Regeneration Unit (ORU) and the Voice Communication Control Panel (VCCP), which are vital for the survivability and communication of the crews working in the Launch Control Center.

Further delays in the modernization of these assets will undoubtedly have adverse effects on the mission capabilities of our nuclear deterrent. The equipment currently being used in our launch

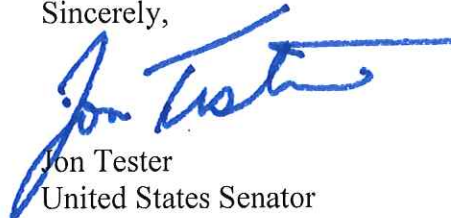
control centers dates back to the Cold War. The supply of diminishing manufacturing sources and material shortages continues to dwindle and as the aging equipment continues to fail, the DoD has nowhere to turn to replace these items.

Delaying this funding into the future will affect every Launch Control Center in every missile field in America. And each day we defer the costs of modernizing our nuclear forces, our communities become less secure and we diminish our ability to deter nuclear threats from our adversaries. Secretary Shanahan, you said as much in your recent testimony in front of the Senate Appropriations Committee.

Further, General Joe Dunford, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs' of Staff, stated unequivocally that the most important mission of the DoD is to deter Nuclear War. That is why these modernizations efforts have been supported by three consecutive Nuclear Posture Reviews. Undue delays in critical funding for the nuclear enterprise will leave the nation in dire need of modernization for all three legs of the triad, as well as our nuclear command and control capability.

Moving forward, we expect the DoD to exercise good judgment in the prioritization of national security threats, and the capabilities needed to safeguard our nation. To that end, we need to know how you will prioritize efforts to get Minuteman III modernization back on track.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jon Tester", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jon Tester
United States Senator