

SENATE BILL REPORT

SJM 8006

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
State Government, Tribal Relations & Elections, February 7, 2020

Brief Description: Requesting that Congress establish more checks and balances to reduce the possibility of nuclear war.

Sponsors: Senators Hasegawa, Keiser, Frockt, Hunt, Kuderer, Pedersen and Saldaña.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: State Government, Tribal Relations & Elections: 2/22/19 [DP, DNP]; 2/07/20 [DPS, w/oRec].

Brief Summary of First Substitute Joint Memorial

- Requests that Congress establish a system of checks and balances to ensure that the President no longer has sole authority to launch nuclear weapons except in retaliation to a nuclear attack and make it the policy of the United States to not use nuclear weapons first.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON STATE GOVERNMENT, TRIBAL RELATIONS & ELECTIONS

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Joint Memorial No. 8006 be substituted therefor, and the substitute joint memorial do pass.

Signed by Senators Hunt, Chair; Kuderer, Vice Chair; Hasegawa and Takko.

Minority Report: That it be referred without recommendation.

Signed by Senators Zeiger, Ranking Member; Muzzall, Assistant Ranking Member.

Staff: Samuel Brown (786-7470)

Background: The U.S. President has sole authority to authorize the use of U.S. nuclear weapons, inherent in the constitutional role as Commander in Chief. The President can seek counsel from military advisors; those advisors are then required to transmit and implement the orders authorizing nuclear use. The President does not need the concurrence of either military advisors or the U.S. Congress to order the launch of nuclear weapons. Neither the military nor Congress can overrule these orders.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Nearly 14,500 nuclear weapons are known to exist in the world, with 6450 in the United States. Naval Base Kitsap-Bangor, on the Kitsap Peninsula, is home to the largest stockpile of nuclear weapons in the Western Hemisphere.

Summary of Joint Memorial: The bill as referred to committee not considered.

Summary of Joint Memorial (First Substitute): The Legislature requests that Congress establish checks and balances to ensure that the President no longer has the sole authority to launch nuclear weapons, except in retaliation to a nuclear attack, and to make it the policy of the United States to not use nuclear weapons first.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on Original Bill (Regular Session 2019): PRO: The fear of global annihilation at the arbitrary decision-making authority of the person who can unilaterally push the button is frightening. Washington should take point on this because we have more nuclear weapons than any other state, which makes us a prime target. Protections are needed from leaders who may not act in our best interests or who may be irrational. We do not need nuclear weapons—we can end the nuclear threat. Nuclear weapons represent a threat to civilization itself. Our conventional weapons are strong enough to defend ourselves. Whether detonated or not, nuclear weapons are detrimental and costly to our society. Nuclear testing has adversely affected the health of the people of the Marshall Islands. Our war expenditures are not making us more secure. State leadership is needed to get this vital issue on the national agenda.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Bob Hasegawa, Prime Sponsor; Louise Lansberry, Washington Against Nuclear Weapons; John Repp, Washington Against Nuclear Weapons; Jade Lauw, Washington Against Nuclear Weapons; Lisa Johnson, Washington Against Nuclear Weapons; Glen Anderson, Olympia Coalition to Abolish Nuclear Weapons; Bruce Amundson, Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility; Laura Skelton, Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility; Mary Hanson, Seattle Fellowship of Reconciliation; Rodney Brunelle, Pax Christi Pacific Northwest; William Burns, WSP.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on First Substitute (Regular Session 2020): PRO: There is nothing normal about any individual in the world having the power to kill billions of people—life is an extremely sacred thing. If the federal government is not addressing this, then the state government should. Elected officials and mainstream media are ignoring this problem. The risk of accident and the danger of nuclear war is escalating. Rebuilding the nation's nuclear arsenal will cost the same amount as all student debt—we should invest in social concerns and human needs. The use of nuclear weapons is a public health issue because the catastrophic destruction they would wreak is not medically treatable.

We face unprecedented risk due to treaties that have been allowed to lapse and new policies that say nuclear weapons can be used as a deterrent against conventional war. Any threat risks escalation to full nuclear war. We are closer now to nuclear war than we have ever been. Oregon and California have similar resolutions, and this would be a strong statement from the entire west coast. Simply possessing nuclear weapons in the first place is profoundly and inherently immoral. Washington State would be ground zero in any nuclear exchange.

This is a step, but much more is needed. The public is not aware of what our government is doing with nuclear weapons—this will start the conversation. Why are we spending money on nuclear weapons instead of investing in homelessness? Risk has increased with low-yield nuclear weapons on Trident submarines. Deployment increases the risk of a miscalculation during a crisis.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Noah Martin, Quaker Voice on Washington Public Policy; Glen Anderson, Olympia Coalition to Abolish Nuclear Weapons; Carly Brook, Joseph Berkson, Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility; Mary Hanson, Seattle Friends of Reconciliation, Ground Zero, From Hiroshima to Hope; Mona Lee, Washington Coalition against Nuclear Weapons; Rodney Brunelle, Pax Christi; Bernard Meyer, Ground Zero Center for Nonviolent Action; Kit Burns, Bob Zeigler, citizens.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.