

Testimony to Vermont House Committee on General, Housing, and Military Affairs, re: JHR-1

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Chairman Stevens, ladies and gentleman, thank you for taking time to consider this issue of utmost importance.

I want to remind you there was a time when most of us in the United States expected a nuclear holocaust. We practiced duck-and-cover in schools, while warning sirens wailed, and we saw fallout shelters being built everywhere. Seeing the grave danger, we took action to reduce the risk dramatically. The risk of nuclear disaster is now increasing and it is time for us to act again.

I was a young physician in training when Ronald Reagan came to the White House with plans to wage and win a war with the Soviet Union. Those of us in PSR looked in great detail at the physical and medical effects of nuclear weapons and were horrified at what they were planning. We took that knowledge to church halls and town meetings all over the country, creating a movement that put 1 million people in the streets of New York City in 1982. Within three years Reagan went from believing he could win a nuclear war to becoming the greatest disarmament president in history. He set the stage for the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaties and the Intermediate Nuclear Force treaty, which lead to great reductions in our risk and the saving of hundreds of billions of dollars. It is important to know that there are 80% fewer nuclear weapons in the world now than in 1980. Even more impressive, there is 87% less megatonnage (destructive power) now than at that time. I do not think it is a stretch to say this may be a major reason why we are still here.

The last few years have seen North Korea and the United States exchanging threats about their capacity to destroy each other. India and Pakistan, both armed with nuclear weapons, are at almost constant low-level war with each other. Tensions between Russia and the United States, which together possess 95% of the world's nuclear arsenal, are at post cold-war highs. In spite of these dangers, Congress, in the recent National Defense Authorization Act funded the beginning of a \$1.6 trillion gift to nuclear weapons manufacturers to build a new nuclear arsenal, while most of the other eight nuclear powers are doing the same.

The tremendous progress we made until recently was not initiated by our federal leaders, but by grassroots efforts of countless ordinary people demanding a safer future. We have a chance to do that again. All over the country cities and states are passing resolutions calling for policy changes to bring us once again back from the brink of nuclear disaster. JHR 1 is a piece of

that work. Vermonters were in the forefront of the planet-saving nuclear freeze in the 1980s with over 150 towns voting to support it. It is time for Vermont to rise again to the challenge of saving the future for our children and grandchildren. I urge you to vote this resolution, preferably with amendments to make it stronger, out of committee and to the floor for the people of Vermont to decide. Thank you.

Addendum:

JHR-1 contains one and a little more of five major risk-reducing policy changes contained a national campaign titled “Back from the Brink”, initiated by Physicians for Social Responsibility and the Union of Concerned Scientists, but now supported by dozens of organizations and endorsed by over 40 cities, large and small, as well as several states encompassing 15% of the U.S. population.

In addition to renouncing first use of nuclear weapons, the Back from the Brink initiative asks the federal government to

- End unchecked presidential authority to launch a nuclear attack,
- Take nuclear weapons off hair-trigger alert,
- Cancel plans to build new enhanced weapons,
- Pursue a verifiable agreement among nuclear states to eliminate their nuclear arsenals.

The whereas clauses in JHR-1 already cover the reasons these are important.

A comprehensive list of cities and states supporting this initiative can be found at preventnuclearwar.org. Most Vermonters seem to think these are good ideas. The City Councils of South Burlington and Winooski passed these in fall of 2018, along with a mayoral proclamation from the city of Burlington. Copies of these are attached, which could provide wording for an amendment to JHR-1

Please do not hesitate to ask me for clarification or more information.

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