

Note to Congress: Stop Spending Our Tax Dollars on Nuclear Weapons

By Robert Dodge

We have the answer to realize significant cost savings, while simultaneously promoting sound fiscal policies that benefit us all and don’t threaten the survival of the human race.

In April our 2024 taxes were due in order to fund the fiscal year 2025 federal budget and thus our nation’s priorities. This year’s budget represents the final Joe Biden budget. It comes at a time when our country is in a deliberate state of chaos instituted by the current administration. Under the non-elected efforts of the Department of Government Efficiency and current cabinet, we find punitive and seemingly random disjointed cutting of essential services, vital programs, and international aid.

The U.S. Congress has just passed a budget resolution requiring \$1.5 trillion in savings to be realized over the next 10 years. Ultimately, budgets are moral documents. How do the current cuts, in addition to planned cuts in entitlement programs such as Medicaid, Medicare, and Social Security, address our needs and follow a moral compass? How does funding nuclear weapons factor in when addressing our needs and priorities?

This year’s federal tax expenditure for all nuclear weapons programs will be \$110.3 billion (including funding, environmental cleanup, and legacy issues). This figure was released on Tax Day by the Nuclear Weapons Community Cost Project. That amounts to \$3,499 per second. This year will see an increase of roughly \$15.8 billion over FY 2024. Congress prides itself on being fiscally responsible. Yet when cities like Detroit are spending over \$114 million on nuclear weapons programs, Atlanta over \$245 million, Chicago over \$961 million, and the impover-

ished Navajo Nation of roughly 113,000 people are spending over \$18 million, where is the rationale, fiscal responsibility, and sanity?

The continuation of this out-of-control escalation is fueled by the myth of deterrence with dramatic increases in weapons delivery systems and missile defeat and defense expenditures. The latter is the present-day version of former President Ronald Reagan’s “Strategic Defense Initiative” or “Star Wars.” Today’s version continues the elusive and easily outfoxed goal of hitting a bullet with a bullet to defend us coupled with a complex early detection system. With roughly 12,331 nuclear weapons in today’s global arsenals, the world remains closer to nuclear war than at any point in the past 80 years since the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* puts our current risk at 89 seconds to midnight and nuclear Armageddon. That risk assessment comes from the current geopolitical turmoil; climate change; and evolving disruptive technologies that increase the risk of nuclear war either by intent, miscalculation, or accident presenting a very real and present danger. Everything and everyone we care about is threatened with the distinct possibility of annihilating the human race.

Unlike a nuclear missile that cannot be recalled after launch, the nuclear arms race and existing arsenals can be reversed and nuclear weapons can be eliminated. What is needed is the political will. The people need to speak, and when the people lead, the leaders will follow.

Fortunately, there is a U.S. grassroots campaign, Back From the Brink (BFTB), demanding elimination of nuclear weapons. BFTB calls on the

United States to take a leadership role in bringing together the world’s nuclear powers to negotiate a time-bound, verifiable, and complete elimination of nuclear weapons. It includes four precautionary measures to safeguard against nuclear war until abolition is achieved: 1) renouncing the first use of nuclear weapons; 2) ending the sole, unchecked authority of U.S. presidents to launch a nuclear attack; 3) taking U.S. weapons off of hair-trigger alert; and 4) canceling plans to replace the U.S. nuclear arsenal with enhanced weapons.

Anyone can endorse this campaign. Presently 495 organizations, 78 municipalities and counties, eight state legislative bodies, 430 municipal and state officials, and 44 members of Congress have endorsed this campaign.

In April, Rep. Jim McGovern, D-Mass., introduced H.R. 317, which would reform U.S. nuclear weapons policy and promote a world free of nuclear weapons. In addition to supporting the policy points of BFTB, this resolution supports: the maintenance of a *de facto* global moratorium on nuclear testing, protecting communities and workers affected by nuclear weapons by fully remediating their deadly legacy of environmental contamination past and present, and peace conversion of the entire nuclear cycle without loss of jobs.

With life itself hanging in the balance, we must all demand a meeting with our legislative leaders, urging them to endorse this legislation. If they refuse, we must ask why they are willing to put everything at risk?

— **Robert Dodge, a family physician, serves as President of Physicians for Social Responsibility-Los Angeles, & is a steering committee member of Back from the Brink.**

Opinion

Who’s on Trump’s list of ‘radical left thugs who live like vermin’?

By John LaForge

I’m married to a German citizen who’s a life-long resident of Hamburg, and I spent most of the winter and spring in this city of 2-million — a far cry from my rural Wisconsin homestead outside a town of 1,067. Not far from our flat is Hamburg’s federal, state, and municipal courthouse square, which has a billboard-sized concrete cuboid monument with a blunt, stark, and grim reminder. It reads simply: 1933. The monument is also the site of Dammtor prison, where during the terror the Nazi regime conducted 468 executions using the guillotine.

It’s frightening to follow news of repression in the United States, and people here ask why I intend to fly back. The short answer is my connection to the rest of my family and friends, my work colleagues, personal identity, the national park system, and the intentional community farmstead that a group of us built with our own hands over the last 36 years.

The prevalence and unpredictable expansion of political persecution is what my friends here and at home are afraid of. They know even high-ranking Republican Party stalwarts like Alaska’s U.S. Senator Lisa Murkowski have said publicly, “We are all afraid. I’m oftentimes very anxious about using my voice because retaliation is real.”

This trepidation in high places prompted Sally Quinn to write in the *New York Times* May 10, “Washington is physically, emotionally, psychologically and spirituality permeated with an invisible poison. The emotion all around ... is fear. Nobody feels safe.” Perhaps nobody should. Trump said Nov. 17, 2023, in New Hampshire, “We will root out the communists, Marxists, fascists, and the radical left thugs that live like vermin within the confines of our country.” I wonder if Sally Quinn and I qualify for the “vermin thug” list.

It’s hard to say, since Trump himself could hardly be more thuggish. On his first day in office he demonstrated that his magical thinking can’t find

thugs among his radical right storm troopers. He released from prison 1,500 January 6 rioters led by far-right militias, many of whom had been convicted of violently assaulting police officers, killing one, and injuring 174 others.

Speaking about thugs with the rightwing website National Pulse, Trump said that immigration was “poisoning the blood of our country” — his Hitlerian dog whistle heard around the world, which he would repeat. At an Ohio rally March 16, 2024, he said about immigrants, “I don’t know if you call them people. In some cases, they’re not people, in my opinion.” Using his best words, Trump added, “I’ve seen the humanity, and these humanity, these are bad, these are animals, okay?”

Dehumanization and vengeful cruelty

Robert Jones of the Public Religion Research Institute told National Public Radio in 2023 that “dehumanization of political opponents are the bricks that pave the road to political violence.” In view of Charlottesville, January 6, and Trump’s blanket pardons of violent, unrepentant rioters, that road’s been paved, resurfaced, and upgraded to a speedway.

Rümeysa Öztürk, a Tufts University graduate student from Turkey, was grabbed on March 25 in Somerville, Massachusetts, by masked secret agents, shipped off to a Louisiana jail, and held there seven weeks for signing an opinion piece in the *co llege paper*. Mahmoud Khalil, a green card holder married to a U.S. citizen, was abducted without a warrant from his Columbia University housing in New York City by ICE agents on March 8 and shipped to jail in Louisiana, although he’s not charged with a crime. Kilmar Armando Abrego Garcia, a Maryland sheet metal worker with no criminal



A stark Brutalist style reminder of the start of Hitler’s fascism in Hamburg’s courthouse square, near its infamous Dammtor prison. Photo: John LaForge

record, was mistakenly shipped to El Salvador’s notorious “Center for Terrorism Confinement” or Cecot, the giant maximum-security prison, in violation of a federal immigration judge’s 2019 order prohibiting the U.S. from returning him to El Salvador, where gangs could “pose a threat to his life.” Garcia was returned June 8 but is jailed in the U.S.

The Kafkaesque nightmare nature of Trump’s martial law is that neither the U.S. State Department nor the government of El Salvador have even identified the 260 prisoners sent to the giant maximum-security prison, and neither state has provided evidence of the men’s alleged crimes or gang membership. A federal judge’s order forbade the White House from invoking a 1798 wartime law to justify the deportations, but the flights had already left. The imprisoned men have effectively vanished indefinitely inside a Salvadoran dictator’s police state’s nihilism, without recourse.

Immigrants aren’t Trump’s only targets. Lydia Polgreen reported on May 8 in the *New York Times* that the president “muses about ejecting U.S. citizens too,” and enacting “the fantasy of expelling every person he deems undesirable.” Is Polgreen a “left thug” too? In January, Trump talked about sending U.S. citizens who are “repeat offenders” to El Salva-

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