

TO: Clergy & Lay Leaders of Northeast Tennessee Congregations  
FROM: Green Interfaith Network Incorporated (GINI) &  
United Religions Initiative NETN Cooperation Circle (URI)  
DATE: February 25, 2018  
RE: Your signature is requested on a Sign-On Letter to Senator Corker  
with the subject: IT IS TWO MINUTES TO MIDNIGHT

For the past 71 years, academic scientists and intellectuals, including Nobel Laureates, have assessed the threat to humanity from nuclear war. Using the symbolic device of a “Doomsday Clock”, the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists has positioned the minute hand closer to or farther away from Midnight – a representation of an apocalyptic disaster for mankind – depending on the assessment of the risk of nuclear war. Since the early part of 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* has included the existential threat to humanity of the climate crisis in their assessment of global security.

On January 25, 2018, the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* again moved the hand of the Doomsday Clock thirty seconds closer to midnight so that it now stands at TWO MINUTES TO MIDNIGHT – the closest it has been since the height of the Cold War. Further, for the first time in 7 decades, the Doomsday Clock was advanced two years in a row because

“world leaders failed to respond effectively to the looming threats of nuclear war and climate change, making the world security situation more dangerous than it was a year ago – and as dangerous as it has been since World War II”.

#### Request from GINI Board & URI Leadership Circle to Clergy and Lay Leaders

The warning issued by the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* alarmed leaders of URI & GINI and action was urged. After deliberation, meetings, and consultation with nuclear weapon and climate experts in our region, a sign-on-letter proposal was developed. Through this memorandum, we hope to present the sources and materials that formed the foundation on which the sign-on letter was constructed.

## NUCLEAR WEAPONS & THE THREAT OF NUCLEAR WAR

### The Doomsday Clock & the Nuclear Posture Review

The Doomsday Clock has been reset several times over the past 5 administrations. Due to the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty and the historic Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (which resulted in the largest reduction in global stockpiles), the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists moved the hands of the Doomsday Clock from 10 to 17 minutes to midnight in 1991. Since then, however, with Indian, Pakistani and North Korean nuclear testing and the American withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, the Doomsday Clock has hovered around 5 minutes to midnight.

Around the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, climate change and the lack of action to avert a 2-degree increase in global temperatures, started to figure into the *Bulletin's* annual deliberations.

The *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* is not alone in raising the alarm about the threat of nuclear war. The Nobel Peace Prize winning group, International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, called the Trump Administration's Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) "A Gold-plated Blueprint for Nuclear War". The Union of Concerned Scientists concluded that the proposed integration of nuclear and non-nuclear military planning constituted preparation for nuclear war-fighting and noted that low-yield nuclear weapons are described in the NPR as "suited for war fighting". The conservative *Economist* magazine even warned that the "commander-in-chief's impulsive personality and the scope for miscalculation over North Korea's missile programme is far more worrying than a considered attempt to plug a gap in America's nuclear arsenal." While *Business Insider Australia* reported in late January that "at a meeting of foreign ministers from 20 countries...Secretary of State Rex Tillerson discussed sanctions implementation for North Korea, while Secretary of Defense James Mattis briefed them on the US's plan for military strikes".

## Brief Review of Interfaith Work for Disarmament

In December 2007, the US Department of Energy's National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) issued a draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on a plan to modernize America's nuclear weapons complex. Through "Complex Transformation", the Bush Administration proposed to update and consolidate facilities at the National Laboratories for "stockpile stewardship", to replace nuclear weapons facilities that could not be repaired, and to add new capacity to produce 80 plutonium warheads per year.

A comment period ensued and the following national faith groups -- which represent the vast majority (if not all) of URI and GINI member congregations -- while supporting a smaller footprint for the nuclear weapons complex, opposed the modernization plan:

**Alliance of Baptists**  
**American Baptist Churches USA**  
**Baptist Peace Fellowship of North America**  
**Church of the Brethren Witness/Washington Office**  
**Churches' Center for Theology and Public Policy**  
**Conference of Major Superiors of Men**  
**Disciples Justice Action Network (Disciples of Christ)**  
**Episcopal Church**  
**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**  
**Friends Committee on National Legislation (Quakers)**  
**Islamic Society of North America**  
**Leadership Conference of Women Religious**  
**Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns**  
**Mennonite Central Committee U.S.**  
**Methodists United for Peace with Justice**  
**National Council of Churches USA**  
**National Religious Partnership on the Nuclear Weapons Danger**  
**NETWORK: A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby**  
**Pax Christi USA: National Catholic Peace Movement**  
**Pentecostals and Charismatics for Peace and Justice**  
**Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)**  
**Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism**  
**Sojourners**  
**Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations**  
**United Church of Christ**  
**United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society**

This interfaith coalition stated in its comments that

**"as religious leaders in the United States, we firmly oppose the administration's multi-billion dollar plan to rebuild the nation's nuclear weapons capabilities through the Department of Energy's Complex Transformation proposal. The administration's plans to**

**rebuild the U.S. nuclear weapons production capacity is dangerous and expensive, and could ignite an arms race, encourage proliferation, and reduce national security.”**

The coalition of religious organizations further stated that the

**“United States has no need for new nuclear weapons production now or in the foreseeable future, either to replace existing warhead types or to build warheads designed for new missions. ... New nuclear weapons for ‘emerging threats’ and new missions are unnecessary and costly, and would undermine international nonproliferation efforts.”**

In addition to the 26 national organizations, another 52 regional and state religious groups joined the interfaith community’s opposition to the modernization plan.

Nevertheless, the Department of Energy (DOE) proceeded with Complex Transformation into the Obama Administration whose Nuclear Posture Review continued to support “significant investments to modernize the nuclear enterprise and maintain a safe, secure, and effective arsenal.”

With the expiration in December 2009 of the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) signed by Presidents George H.W. Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev, the Obama Administration entered into negotiations with Russia seeking further cuts in the arsenals of both nations through a New START treaty.

As a condition of his support for New START, Senator Corker sought and obtained from President Obama a commitment of \$80-85 billion over 10 years to continue funding modernization. In a news release posted to his official website on December 22, 2010, Senator Corker stated that

**“thanks in part to the contributions my staff and I have been able to make, the New START treaty could easily be called the ‘Nuclear Modernization and Missile Defense Act of 2010.’ ... To date, we have received appropriate commitments to fully fund modernization and an update to the 10-year modernization plan for the nuclear weapons complex...I believe these commitments accommodate current and future needs and are in line with our national security obligations.”**

Nine years later, a new coalition consisting of the National Association of Evangelicals, the National Latino Evangelical Coalition & the US Conference of Catholic Bishops joined the Union of Concerned Scientists in urging the Obama Administration to scale back the modernization plan rather than spend “money we don’t have on weapons we don’t need”, to cancel the new nuclear-armed cruise missile, to reduce the US

deployed strategic arsenal by a third (stating that “the Pentagon agreed that it was “adequate to maintain security”), and to take land-based missiles off of hair-trigger alert. None of these requests were met by the last administration.

Now, the Trump Administration plans to develop 4 new nuclear warheads; deploy low-yield tactical nuclear weapons; reverse the previous administration’s retirement of a nuclear-armed submarine-launched cruise missile; rejects Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty ratification and plans instead to “maintain and enhance...testing capabilities”; provide “enduring capability and capacity to produce plutonium pits at a rate of no fewer than 80 pits per year by 2030”; and threatens to use nuclear weapons and inflict “intolerable consequences” against adversaries and even non-nuclear states that are party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). According to the Trump Administration, “there is no doubt that the sustainment and replacement program should be regarded as both necessary and affordable”.

However, not only is there doubt about the necessity for mutually-assured destruction strategies, there is also a rejection from faith leaders of nuclear weapons spending. For example, the World Council of Churches stated in 2009 that “the production and deployment as well as the use of nuclear weapons are a crime against humanity and must be condemned on ethical and theological grounds”.

The wealth of the US that is now planned to be squandered on the weapons complex has ballooned from hundreds of billions of dollars to \$1.25 trillion and the 2030 deadline for modernization seems to have been indefinitely extended. In a recent interview, the former chief of staff to Secretary of State Colin Powell estimated that the cost will be \$2-3 trillion,

**“maybe even \$4 trillion, because that’s what the cost overruns will be, and that’s what we’ll spend over the next 10 to 15 years to do this. And we do not need it. ... This is to assuage the military-industrial complex in America that deals with nuclear weapons.”**

On April 16, 1953, in an address to the American Society of Newspaper Editors, Dwight D. Eisenhower said:

**“Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children. This is not a way of life at all in any true sense. Under the cloud of threatening war, it is humanity hanging from a cross of iron.”**

Sixty five years later, nuclear weapons are still robbing food, shelter, education and health care from the poor through our government’s misallocation of its budgetary resources.

### Restricting First Use of Nuclear Weapons Act

As Religions for Peace recalls for us, the ethical, legal and religious imperatives for nuclear abolition have their roots in morality, “and the moral sense of the community draws deeply from the reservoirs of morality that are present in religion”. And while people of faith abhor any use of the bomb and support legislation to abolish it (such as Rep. Eleanor Holmes Norton’s bill), given the current threat of nuclear war and the urgent need to get in war’s way, legislation that would prevent any US president from using nuclear weapons in a conflict without Congress first declaring war on the adversary seems critical at this time. This legislation -- a copy of which is in your packet -- is known as the “Restricting First Use of Nuclear Weapons Act of 2017”, S.200 or the Markey-Lieu Bill. While not perfect, if S.200 were enacted, this legislation would go a long way toward easing nuclear tensions. Given the immediacy of the threat of US first use, as well as the proposal by the Trump Administration to use nuclear weapons against an adversary for even a cyber attack, it is with a sense of urgency that we believe that Senator Corker should join the 13 co-sponsors of S.200, advance the bill out of the Foreign Relations Committee that he chairs, and help to get S.200 enacted by a veto-proof majority of the Congress – before threats are acted upon.

## CLIMATE CHANGE & THE THREAT TO HUMANITY

In 2007 when the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* moved the Doomsday Clock from 7 to 5 minutes to midnight, its reasoning included the “dire challenge to humanity” that climate change represents. “Loss of life and property” from “flooding, destructive storms, increased drought, and polar ice melt” were already cause for concern a decade ago.

This year’s rationale for resetting the Doomsday Clock to 2 minutes to midnight included the installation of climate deniers in the EPA and Interior Department, withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, and reversal of climate and energy policies that sought to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. These federal decisions were made

**“against a backdrop of worsening climate change and high-impact weather-related disasters” when “the Caribbean region and other parts of North America suffered a season of historic damage from exceedingly powerful hurricanes ... and the US witnessed devastating wildfires”.**

After plateauing for a few years, greenhouse gas emissions resumed their stubborn rise in 2017. That’s why groups like Interfaith Power and Light – the national organization that GINI is affiliated with – continue to strive to fulfill our mission to be “faithful stewards of Creation by responding to global warming through the promotion of energy conservation, energy efficiency and renewable energy.”

From Baha’i to Unitarian Universalists, members of Interfaith Power and Light have committed to care for and protect both our neighbors and Creation, recognizing that the most vulnerable among us are impacted first and hardest by the effects of climate change and carbon pollution. For example, the Presbyterian Church (USA) urges its faithful, among many other recommendations, to

**...“pray, asking for God’s forgiveness and for the power and guidance to enjoy and care for creation in new ways”; to  
...“stand with ‘the least of these’ (Matt. 25:40) and advocate for the poor and oppressed in present and future generations who are often the victims of environmental injustice and who are least able to mitigate the impact of global warming that will fall disproportionately upon them”; and to  
...“support legislative and policy proposals that...internalize the social and environmental costs related to greenhouse gas emissions in the prices of fossil fuels”.**

## Pricing fossil fuels through Carbon Fee & Dividend

Political solutions to the climate crisis have been proposed to the Congress by the non-partisan Citizens' Climate Lobby (CCL) and by the Climate Leadership Council of Republican elder statesmen, yet the Congress has failed to act on either plan for limiting greenhouse gas emissions. These organizations have devised a revenue-neutral carbon fee and dividend program that would gradually increase the price of carbon (the major greenhouse gas) causing demand to drop for fossil fuels because of their increased cost. Under this plan, the fees collected by the Treasury would be rebated back to consumers through a monthly dividend check. A fact sheet explaining CCL's carbon-fee-and-dividend proposal is included in your packet.

Just as with the environmental contamination caused by nuclear weapons production and testing, the impacts of climate disruption fall disproportionately on the poor. The Marshall Islanders -- victims of nuclear weapons testing and of rising sea levels -- are unfortunate examples of how the poor are impacted the most by the arms race and by global warming. Ranked 189<sup>th</sup> out of 229 countries in gross domestic product per capita, the average income of a Marshall Islander is less than 6% of an American's. Even though it is one of the most contaminated places on Earth due to weapons testing and the No. 2 cause of death is cancer, there are no permanent oncologists in the country. Resettled from downwind islands after Bikini Atoll was obliterated by the Castle Bravo Test on March 1, 1954, many Marshallese are now crowded onto an island known as "the slum of the Pacific". The 67 tests that were conducted in the Marshall Islands from 1946 to 1958 created craters where islands once rose up from the Pacific. Now, rising sea levels attributed to global warming imperil the homes and lives of a people truly living on the brink.

To paraphrase Rev. Martin Luther King's "Mountaintop Speech", if we do not stop to help the poor suffering from nuclear contamination and rising sea levels, what will happen to them?

Through this letter to our Senator, we ask you to join us in advocating for the least among us.

On behalf of GINI & URI,  
Linda.

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Nuclear Prayer

**The Beginning and the End are in your hands, O Creator of the Universe. And in our hands you have placed the fate of this planet. We, who are tested by having both creative and destructive power in our free will, turn to you in sober fear and in intoxicating hope. We ask for your guidance and to share in your imagination in our deliberations about the use of nuclear force. Help us to lift the fog of atomic darkness that hovers so pervasively over our Earth, Your Earth, so that soon all eyes may see life magnified by your pure light.**

**Bless all of us who wait today for your Presence and who dedicate ourselves to achieve your intended peace and rightful equilibrium on Earth. In the Name of all that is holy and all that is hoped. Amen.**