

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

September 29, 2004

The Honorable George W. Bush
President of the United States
The White House
Washington, DC 20001

The Honorable John F. Kerry
United States Senate
304 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

President Bush and Senator Kerry:

We write to you as supporters of ballistic missile defense (BMD), and specifically a ground-based national missile defense (GMD) system. No matter who wins the next election, the next President will face important decisions early in his term in regard to GMD.

The impending deployment of an initial system at Fort Greeley, Alaska and Vandenberg Air Force Base, California, marks the end of the long debate as to whether to deploy GMD. We believe it is important to place the program on a bipartisan footing, and we would like to share our thoughts on a few critical issues. How you address those issues may determine whether support for ballistic missile defense generally, and GMD in particular, can be broadened.

There is no substitute for flight testing. We understand the reasons for providing some protection against an ICBM attack from North Korea, even if the level of protection is uncertain; however, the Missile Defense Agency (MDA) has not conducted an intercept flight-test of this system for almost two years, and the last test in December, 2002 was a failure. Moreover, the "kill vehicle" that intercepts the oncoming warhead has never been tested with the booster that it is mounted upon, and the system has never had an integrated test with the radars that will actually guide it in operation.

The MDA is confident that computer simulations justify the decision to place missiles in an operational status before conducting a single flight test of the operational system. Obviously, more testing prior to the placement of the system on operational status would be preferable, but failing this, the system must undergo a much more demanding regimen of flight tests in the future. If you are President in 2005, we urge you to increase the number and realism of tests so that the Department of Defense, Congress, the people, and those we aim to deter will know we are fielding an effective system.

Testing prior to decision to expanding deployment. Despite significant concerns in Congress, the Pentagon is ready to commit funds to expand the GMD system beyond the initial 20 interceptors. We believe it would be prudent to divert that funding into robust testing. An initial deployment of 20 interceptors can meet the stated goal of having interceptors in place to defend against a small strike by the North Koreans or another rogue country, but testing prior to further expansion is warranted given the paucity of meaningful tests to date. Approximately \$591 million was appropriated for expanding deployment in fiscal year 2005, enough to finance several additional flight tests, including the procurement of test articles.

Complete the GMD system. The GMD system is being put into an operational status without its most essential sensors: an X-band radar and a complementary space-based infrared tracking system. Both are needed to provide precise tracking, particularly after the boost phase is complete, and to ensure that the kill vehicle can distinguish the incoming warheads from debris and countermeasures.

While the MDA is building a sea-based X-band radar, it will not be ready for another year and is not a dedicated operational asset but is designed for testing. The radar will not have a full complement of the transmit/receive modules, limiting its power, and it will not have back-up computer systems to ensure operational capability under adverse circumstances. The space-based infrared system being developed, the Space Surveillance and Tracking System, only plans to launch two prototype satellites in the next few years, which is far short of an effective constellation.

If you are President in 2005, we urge you to address these deficiencies and provide an X-band radar that is fully capable and dedicated to the defense system. We also urge you to review the SSTS program with an eye towards fielding an operational capability more quickly than currently planned.

Avoid exaggerating the capabilities of the GMD system. As we acknowledged before, there are reasons for having interceptors to defend against a possible strike. However, it is not in the interest of the United States to overstate the capability of the system for several reasons:

- First, deploying an untested system may send the wrong signal to our adversaries.
- Second, deploying without rigorous testing will deprive us of knowing weaknesses and shortcomings, and having the opportunity to correct them.
- Third, deploying without adequate testing will create a false sense of security. This system will not even counter all missile threats; it will be inoperative against “low flying” missiles, such as a SCUD launched from sea or a cruise missile.

Revisit the opportunity costs of national missile defense. We do not dismiss the risk that a nation like North Korea could acquire an ICBM and use it, or threaten its use, against the United States. However, our nation faces many threats, and our troops in the field face a clear and present danger from short-range ballistic missiles. Overall funding for BMD has grown to \$10 billion per year, and the share devoted to national missile defense (the GMD system, the kinetic energy interceptor

system, space-based options) relative to theater missile defense (TMD) systems has also grown substantially. Should the voters choose you in November, we urge you to consider whether the overall amount of funding for ballistic missile defense is commensurate to the threat, and whether the balance struck between national missile defense (NMD) and TMD is appropriate. TMD enjoys strong bipartisan support, and a rebalancing of funding between NMD and TMD will broaden the support for BMD generally.

Ballistic missile defense, particularly the issue of national missile defense, has been a matter of partisan dispute for too long. We believe there is bipartisan support for NMD as long as it is held to the same standards of any other weapon system. At this stage, NMD needs neither cheerleaders nor pallbearers; it needs rigorous testing and unbiased candor. We believe that the steps outlined above will help the next administration broaden bipartisan support for ballistic missile defense in general.

Respectfully,


John M. Spratt, Jr.
Member of Congress


Silvestre Reyes
Member of Congress