

**Slade Gorton
10900 NE 8th Street
Suite 1640
Bellevue, WA 98004**

October 20, 2015

Dear Mitch,

Here is an important issue on which even Hillary is right.

During the recent Democrat presidential debate she was asked to name the greatest threat to our country. She said that it is not only the spread of nuclear weapons, but nuclear materials falling into the hands of terrorists.

Of course this is not a new issue . In the first 2004 presidential debate, President George W. Bush and Senator (now Secretary of State) John Kerry both named nuclear proliferation and the threat of nuclear terrorism as our country's greatest threats. Also sounding the alarm was the 9/11 Commission, to which as you know, I served as Trent Lott's appointee , which gave this country a near-failing grade in counterproliferation efforts and recommended that we increase the effectiveness of our nonproliferation programs. Despite these warnings, our experts continue to be deeply worried about the U.S. government's commitment and approach to securing nuclear weapons and highly dangerous materials still scattered in Russia and other countries of the former Soviet Union. The greatest danger of another catastrophic attack on the United States will materialize if the world's most dangerous terrorists acquire the world's most dangerous weapons. As a former member of the 9/11 Commission, my judgment is that our government is not doing much better now.

For a considerable period of time, the Department of Energy (DOE) has been discussing drastic changes to a critical nuclear material disposal program called the Mixed Oxide (MOX) Fuel Project. The key MOX Project facility is being constructed at the Savannah River site in Aiken, South Carolina. This facility supports an agreement the U.S. signed with Russia in 2000 (and amended in 2010) that calls on each country to dispose of no less than 34 metric tons of plutonium from nuclear weapons, which together is enough to build about 17,000 nuclear weapons.

This is a long time bipartisan effort, supported by the Clinton and Bush administrations, and the first term of the Obama administration. It has enjoyed bipartisan support in both the Senate and House. This is why it is extremely disappointing and risky to U.S. national security for the Obama administration to consider terminating construction of the MOX facility, which is almost

70 percent complete, and to turn to new, untested disposal methods which are likely to have significant consequences not only on U.S. and Russian efforts to dispose of weapons-grade plutonium, but on nuclear clean-up efforts in the United States as well.

As you remember, our former colleagues Sam Nunn and Dick Lugar led the effort to secure support and funding for nuclear nonproliferation and cooperative threat reduction programs, particularly working with Russia to ensure that nuclear materials were secured. So I'm asking you to carry on their important work. The best way now is to continue funding construction and finish the last one-third of the MOX Project's main facility.

An alarming series of events was recently made public. The FBI and others helped thwart nuclear smugglers from the former Soviet Union who were caught multiple times trying to sell nuclear materials on the black market, including to representatives of an Islamic State terror organization. Now that we know that these nuclear smugglers were thwarted, we should not only prevent the DOE from cancelling MOX construction, but should accelerate the funding and completion of the MOX facility. This critical decision should not fall to inside politics and unwise budget maneuvers. It is important that the MOX program continue and that the U.S. and Russia carry out their previously agreed upon efforts to dispose of surplus stocks of weapons-grade plutonium.

Let's not allow the DOE to cancel the important MOX Project construction – instead, we should find a way to move forward, finish the job, and work to eliminate these dangerous nuclear materials in both the U.S. and Russia, ensuring that they won't fall into the wrong hands to be used against us or our allies.

Sincerely,



Slade Gorton

US Senator

R WA 1981-87; 1989-2001