

Testimony for committee hearing on 2024 – H 7329

Honorable Chairman and Committee Members,

My name is William W. Smith III, of
244 Hull Cove Farm Rd, Jamestown, RI 02835

Thank you for taking my testimony on this Resolution, which would add the voice of the Rhode Island Legislature to the worldwide call for a sane end to the dangers of nuclear war. I have testified before this committee on similar resolutions in 2022 and 2023, so I will be brief.

A nuclear war would be devastating for Rhode Island. We live in the zone, the East Coast from Maine to Miami, that would be bombed and over-bombed by multiple nuclear explosions. Our culture would be destroyed. Our beautiful shiny cars would be burned-out hulks, with the glass melted, the paint vaporized, and the tires burned to ash. We would have no phone service whether landline or mobile. We would have no electricity, no food deliveries to our supermarkets, no fuel or roads for transport. Our bridges would be twisted wrecks. Our buildings, including this beautiful marble statehouse, would look like a wasteland. The fish in our ocean waters would die of radiation poisoning, the deer and raccoons would find no place to live in our burned forests, and we, the human occupants of this bountiful land, would die either sudden or lingering deaths.

Is all this likely to happen? Our government and our national security apparatus don't seem to think so. But as we know from watching air transport, any machine can break down. In fact, over the past 70 years there have been 15 times documented in the open public record when nuclear war has nearly broken out, due to mistake, miscommunication, malfunction, or diplomatic crisis. Just check on Wikipedia, on the page 'close calls to nuclear war.' This averages to one Almost Armageddon every 4.6 years. Not a good number.

We live in a dangerous time, and these terrible thermonuclear weapons, by their very existence, threaten us.

What can you do about this, as local Rhode Island Representatives? Clearly our national government, along with our military leaders and our high level think tankers are not responding to this danger. Since 1970 it has been official US policy, under international law via the NPT Treaty, to completely disassemble these weapons. But that has not happened. Some 1500 strategic weapons remain on both the US and Russian sides, as well as many more so-called 'mothballed' or 'battlefield size' weapons. And as we head into 2024, the arms control treaties that have constrained both superpowers are breaking down. The INF treaty has been abandoned, and the NEW START, the last remaining treaty to limit US and Russian stockpiles, has not been renewed. Both the USA and Russia, as well as China, are building new and more deadly nuclear weapons and delivery systems.

One way that you as representatives can help avoid nuclear disaster is by passing the resolution before you, to help raise awareness of a new and exciting treaty, the 2021 UN Treaty on Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. This treaty offers a way for the United States to regain international leadership. The US President could sign this treaty, and then, before ratification, without any unilateral disarmament, he or she could challenge Russia and China and the rest of the world to join us in taking these weapons apart. Under this scenario, all the n-weapons nations could ratify the new treaty at the same time, and continue to dismantle their stockpiles under close supervision and verification.

In closing, I urge you to pass this Resolution out of committee, and I furthermore urge each of you to consult with Speaker Shekarchi to request his assistance in moving this Resolution #7329 for a vote by the full House this spring.

Thank you, William W. Smith III