

Testimony of Peter Bergel on SJM 5, April 3, 2019

Chair Burdick and Members of the Rules Committee:

My name is Peter Bergel and I live at 1850 Saginaw St., Salem, OR. I am here today representing Oregon PeaceWorks.

During the early 1980s I was Director of Citizen Action for Lasting Security, Oregon's statewide Nuclear FREEZE organization, working to stop the production, testing and deployment of new nuclear weapons. In the mid-to-late 1980s I was one of 6 co-founders of the American Peace Test, an organization which brought tens of thousands from all over the US to the Nevada Test Site to offer civil resistance to the testing of nuclear weapons, which was then taking place every 3 weeks on average. The moratorium on nuclear weapons testing, which was finally achieved in 1992, was good work (in which, by the way, Oregon played a major role), but it was only one step on the long road to nuclear abolition. Another important step that took place around that time was the meeting between President Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev, which resulted in the Treaty on Intermediate Nuclear Forces, recently vacated by President Trump.

In order for Oregonians to, as SJM 5 says, "live a life free from nuclear contamination and the threat posed by the reckless use of nuclear weapons" much more must be done. SJM 5 spells out both the short-term and long-term actions the US government could - and should - take in the name of national security to truly protect our people from the monster that was unleashed at Almagordo, NM in 1945 when the US tested its first atomic bomb. Years ago, in a different context, I shared this quotation from playwright Anton Chekhov with Chair Burdick: "If you hang a gun on the wall in the first act, you must use it by the third." How long do we think the nuclear gun can hang on the world's wall before it is used again?

As Albert Einstein said, "a new type of thinking is essential if mankind is to survive and move toward higher levels." SJM 5 suggests that type of thinking, and it appears that our federal government needs to be prompted to engage in it.

Perhaps this memorial will become just another piece of paper on the desks of people who already have too much on their desks. Still, the effort is worthwhile. The punchline of an old Jewish joke is "what harm could it do?" I ask that same question of this committee.

Moreover, I want the committee to know that efforts like this are afoot in other states besides Oregon. They are part of building - as we did in the 1980s, and before that in the 1950s - a powerful movement that ultimately will have the power to compel action from our government.

This committee has the option of becoming part of that movement for the defense of humankind against its less worthy self, or of standing aside and allowing the opportunity to play a part to pass it by. I urge this committee to help lead this desperately needed movement by voting SJM 5 to the Senate floor with a "do pass" recommendation.