

United States Senate  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 23, 2005

The President  
The White House  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

It has been one year since the last round of six-party talks aimed at eliminating North Korea's nuclear weapons programs. We are writing today to urge you to do everything in your power to address the threat to U.S. national security and international stability from North Korea's pursuit of nuclear weapons. In April 2004, the Vice President stated in a speech that "it is important that we make progress in this area. Time is not necessarily on our side." More than one year later, the record before us leads us to conclude that no real progress has been made, and time continues not to be on our side. With respect to the challenge of North Korea, American national security has degraded over the past year.

The North Korean regime is responsible for its foolish and irresponsible pursuit of a nuclear weapons program, yet the issue of North Korea's nuclear programs is a serious and urgent matter that needs more attention from the Administration. From 1992 until recently most experts have assessed that North Korea had the capability to produce 1-2 nuclear weapons. Today, after North Korean withdrawal from the Agreed Framework, their declaration that since 2002 they have reprocessed 8,000 plutonium spent fuel rods previously under international monitoring under the Agreed Framework, and their February assertion that they have nuclear weapons, we are now faced with the real possibility that North Korea may have eight or more nuclear weapons, largely acquired in the last couple years.

If North Korea chooses to test a nuclear weapon, there will be no question of its capabilities and it is not unreasonable to expect neighboring states in Northeast Asia to develop their own nuclear weapons, fueling a dangerous, destabilizing competition. Moreover, there is no guarantee that the North Korean government will not sell nuclear material, technology or even weapons to our enemies. Therefore, we believe that it must be one of the highest priorities of our nation to prevent a North Korean nuclear test, to secure a guarantee that North Korea will not transfer materials or know-how to anyone, and to completely, verifiably, and irreversibly eliminate North Korea's nuclear weapons programs and capability.

Our current path leads to one of two bad outcomes: either the United States essentially will acquiesce to the North's serial production of nuclear weapons, or we will find ourselves in a military confrontation with a desperate, nuclear-armed, regime.

A third way remains possible: First, we urge you to appoint a special envoy to coordinate Korea policy and represent us in direct dialogue with North Korea and at the Six Party talks.

The United States should not fear talking to other nations, and when we do, we should speak with one authoritative voice.

Second, priorities must be set. Our most urgent tasks are to end North Korea's production of plutonium, remove all fissile material from the country, and dismantle its nuclear weapons related facilities. To accomplish these objectives, the United States should continue to propose a phased, reciprocal, verifiable deal to eliminate North Korea's nuclear weapons programs in exchange for security assurances, economic assistance, and diplomatic normalization. However, we should differentiate immediate threats, such as the North's plutonium stockpile, from longer-term threats, such as its pursuit of uranium enrichment. Of course, at the end of the day, we need all of the North's nuclear weapons related efforts to cease.

Once we accomplish these tasks – which is possible with strong Chinese and South Korean support – we can then encourage the gradual transformation of the North Korean state. No one in the United States approves of the North Korean government, and we all want to see change there. But China and South Korea will not support a U.S. policy of coercive regime change, and that option should not be pursued.

There is no guarantee that this diplomatic effort will succeed, but the current approach seems almost guaranteed to fail. We must convince North Korea that it will pay a high price for nuclear adventurism. But we must also demonstrate that a nuclear weapons-free North Korea will be accepted by us, despite our dislike of its regime. So far, we have done neither. Until we do both, we are running the unacceptable risk of nuclear disaster.

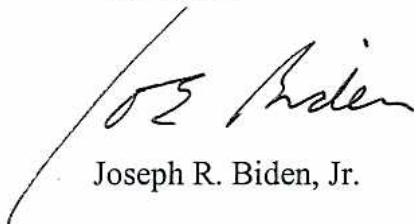
Sincerely,



Carl Levin



Harry Reid



Joseph R. Biden, Jr.



John D. Rockefeller, IV