

Tauscher Leads Group Urging President Bush to Extend START Treaty

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Kevin Lawlor, 202/225-1880

July 24, 2006

www.tauscher.house.gov

Rep. Ellen Tauscher Leads Group Urging President Bush to Extend START Treaty

Nearly Thirty Colleagues, including Chairmen of 3 Key Committees, Sign Letter Encouraging an Extension of Major Nuclear Weapons Treaty until New Agreement is Reached

Washington, DC – Rep. Ellen Tauscher, Chairman of the Strategic Forces Subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee, led 27 of her colleagues including Chairman Ike Skelton of the House Armed Services Committee, Chairman John Conyers of the House Judiciary Committee, and Chairman Tom Lantos of House International Relations Committee in sending a letter to President Bush urging an extension of the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) today.

START provides for legally binding nuclear weapons reductions in Russia and the United States as well as associated verification measure. The agreement is set to expire in December of 2009.

“It’s not enough to simply say you will reduce deployed nuclear weapons. The Bush administration needs to go a step further and officially extend START and its associated verification mechanisms,” said Rep. Tauscher. “Failure to extend this treaty puts the United States in the precarious situation of having no legal measure to account for and reduce both Russian and our own nuclear weapons levels for the first time in nearly two decades. This is both a risky and unacceptable outcome that threatens our national security.”

“We applaud Chairwoman Tauscher for focusing much needed attention on this critical arms control issue. I’m glad to see that Congress is playing this vital oversight role,” said Daryl Kimball, Executive Director of the Arms Control Association.

Signed in 1991, START has imposed new limits on long range nuclear forces in both the Russia and the United States. Since then both nations have reduced their deployed strategic nuclear forces from approximately 10,000 warheads each to no more than 6,000 apiece. The accord also limits each nation to 1,600 delivery vehicles, ICBMs, submarine-launched ballistic missiles and heavy bombers.

Below is the full text of the letter sent to the President today:

July 24, 2007

The Honorable George W. Bush
President of the United States of America
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC

Dear Mr. President:

We write to urge you to work with the Russian Federation to extend the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) after it expires in December 2009.

We were pleased that, in a joint statement issued July 3, 2007, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Russian Minister for Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov reiterated the intention of the United States and Russia "to carry out strategic offensive reductions to the lowest possible level consistent with their national security requirements and alliance commitments." We are also pleased that both acknowledged the need for "a post-START arrangement to provide continuity and predictability regarding strategic offensive forces."

We are concerned however that both governments have not agreed to extend START in its current form and have just begun working on a post-START agreement. Without a legally binding follow-on agreement that includes a commitment to verifiable reductions in both countries' nuclear arsenals below the levels contained in SORT (Treaty on Strategic Offensive Reductions), the United States and Russia risk creating greater strategic uncertainty and further eroding the international nonproliferation regime. The continuing risk that nuclear weapons could fall into the hands of terrorists coupled with the possibility that additional nations will consider developing nuclear weapons should compel the United States and Russia do everything within their power to reduce the global nuclear danger.

The START treaty, signed on July 31, 1991, imposed new limits on long range nuclear forces, and both Russia and the United States achieved those reductions by the required date of December 5, 2001. Under START, both countries reduced their deployed strategic nuclear forces from approximately 10,000 warheads each to no more than 6,000 apiece. The accord also limits each side to 1,600 delivery vehicles-ICBMs, submarine-launched ballistic missiles, and heavy bombers.

Yet the arms limits imposed by START are not the treaty's only enduring legacy. START also included a comprehensive verification regime, including formal data exchanges, notifications, and on-site inspections. The transparency required by the START verification regime has bred confidence in both Russia and the U.S. enabling cooperation on a range of nuclear arms issues. Moreover, verification directly supports U.S. national security interests by giving insight into Russia's arsenal of nuclear weapons. While changes to these verification measures may be appropriate, their core elements must be extended.

As your nominee for Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General James Cartwright, said in an interview last summer, "The attributes that you would seek [in a START extension] are transparency, the ability to generate warning time, and confidence in what the intentions are of a counterpart." General Cartwright also noted that if the verification measures could not be modified, they should remain in force, rather than be allowed to expire. We agree.

The START treaty requires the United States and Russia to begin discussions regarding the future of the treaty no later than one year prior to December 2009. Given this requirement, we are interested in better understanding the administration's approach and request that you keep us fully informed regarding your plans and objectives. We also ask that the intelligence community provide the Congress with an assessment of our ability to monitor Russian nuclear forces in the absence of START.

We ask that you carefully consider extending START in its current form in order to enable your and President Putin's successors to negotiate a new legally binding agreement that achieves greater, verifiable reductions in each nation's nuclear forces.

Finally, we ask that you consult with Congress on your approach and on the framework that you develop.

Reducing the global nuclear danger is a legacy we all would like to achieve for the sake of our children and future generations. We stand ready to work with you to achieve this goal.

Co-Signers

The following Members of Congress signed the letter authored by Rep. Ellen Tauscher:

Chairman Ike Skelton, Chairman John Conyers, Chairman Tom Lantos, Reps. John Spratt, Adam Smith, Yvette Clarke, Tom Allen, Barbara Lee, James McGovern, Dianne Watson, Ed Markey, Jesse Jackson, Sam Farr, Doris Matsui, Darlene Hooley, Tammy Baldwin, Betty McCollum, David Loebsack, Howard Berman, Raul Grijalva, Henry Waxman, Zoe Lofgren, Mike Honda, Maurice Hinchey, Joe Crowley, Lynn Woolsey, Rob Andrews, Ralph Hall, and David Wu.