

The Miami Herald

Found on Miami.com
The Miami Herald

May 17, 2005 Tuesday FL EDITION

SECTION: A; Pg. 19

LENGTH: 580 words

HEADLINE: Reduce our nuclear arsenal;
NONPROLIFERATION TREATY

BYLINE: BY GEORGE MCGOVERN; www.sensiblepriorities.org

BODY:

It's ironic that 36 years ago, when I joined fellow senators from both sides of the aisle in ratifying the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, our leaders had more optimism and conviction about reducing the world's nuclear arsenals than they have today.

Then, even as the Cold War was gathering momentum, Richard Nixon eagerly signed the nonproliferation treaty, committing America and other nations with nuclear weapons to reduce and ultimately abolish their arsenals, while nonnuclear signatories pledged not to build nuclear bombs.

Most of the world's nations kept their promise, but we have not.

There's no better time than now for America to capture the bipartisan spirit that spawned the nonproliferation treaty, and insist on immediate negotiations to ban nuclear weapons worldwide.

This month, representatives of the 188 signatories of the nonproliferation treaty are meeting at the United Nations for the treaty's latest five-year review conference. It's an opportunity to put nuclear disarmament on the international front burner, where it should be.

The case for cutting our arsenal of about 10,000 nuclear bombs has never been stronger.

After all, relations between our nation and Russia, which also has about 10,000 nuclear bombs, remain solid as we join together in fighting our mutual terrorist enemies across the globe.

But let's face it; we are now beyond the debate about how many bombs are required to maintain deterrence. We can deter any nuclear nation with a fraction of the nuclear weapons that we possess today.

It's simply bureaucratic momentum and lack of leadership that allows us to keep our huge nuclear arsenal deployed based on a logic that lost its currency more than a decade ago.

And we are paying the price economically. This gets to the heart of why we should

act today to shed our oversized nuclear weapons arsenal.

We face a record budget deficit, with no end in sight, as our wars in Afghanistan and Iraq drag on. Meanwhile, our public schools are literally crumbling, tens of million of us, including millions of kids, don't have health insurance.

We're not covering the basics. Yet, according to Lawrence Korb, an assistant secretary of defense under Ronald Reagan, we could save \$10 billion by reducing our arsenal to a maximum of 1,000 warheads.

It's outrageous that we don't take action immediately to get this done.

I'd like to see the money from nuclear bombs freed to pay for such urgent matters as healthcare, education and national debt reduction. Liberals and conservatives can surely agree on a package of priorities that could be funded through the nuclear peace dividend. Tax cuts could be part of it.

Let's start from the common ground that these bombs are a waste and take action now, when we so badly need to straighten out Washington's mixed up priorities.

I think it's possible, just as President Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev did in negotiating an end to the Cold War.

It's not too late for President Bush -- who has promised to reduce our arsenal in the long term -- to stand up and tell the world's nations meeting at next week's international nonproliferation conference in New York that America will lead the way now -- not 10 years from now -- to nuclear disarmament.

And then Bush should actually do it, as President Nixon promised when he signed the nuclear nonproliferation treaty.

George McGovern, a former U.S. senator, is a member of **Business Leaders for Sensible Priorities**.