P.S. to the NEWS
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TESTING MINUTEMEN

For years, the appeasement-minded Senators have been assuring us that the Soviets will never fire their nuclear missiles at us because the United States has sufficient missiles to retaliate and destroy the Soviet Union. The plain fact is, however, that we don't know whether our missiles can hit the Soviet Union at all -- because our principal weapon, the Minuteman missile, has never had an operational test. Hardly ever? No, never.

For two years during World War II, I fired machine guns and rifles to test ammunition at the largest ammunition plant in the world. So, I know that the principle of the random-sample operational test is not only valid, but it is essential both to our national security and to the safety of the men who handle our weapons.

Only by a sound testing program can we be sure of the reliability, accuracy, velocity, penetration, and function capability of our weapons. Without tests to determine that they will fulfill their missions, we are placing our servicemen and our nation in dire danger.

Prior to World War II, Congress made the foolish mistake of not appropriating funds to test our torpedoes. After Pearl Harbor, we were forced to use these untested torpedoes. As a result, our submarine commanders had to watch their well-aimed torpedoes bounce off the hulls of Japanese warships.

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In the last few years, we have conducted many tests of our Poseidon missile. It's a good thing that we did, because these tests revealed a failure rate of 58 percent. We are now in the process of making the changes and modifications in our Poseidon missiles which these tests showed were necessary.

It is vitally important that we have similar operational tests of our Minuteman missiles from their actual silos so we can find out if they work, or if they, too, have a failure rate of 58 percent. Under the current Air Force plan, the missiles would be fired by combat crews from underground silos at Malmstrom Air Force Base in Montana on a trajectory to a target area in the Phoenix Islands in the Pacific Ocean.

There will be no warhead in the missile so the test will not pose any nuclear danger whatsoever. Each missile's nuclear warhead would be replaced with a "destruct package" of conventional explosives to blow up if the missile malfunctions or veers off course.

Until now, the Minuteman has been flight-tested by taking one missile out of its operational base and moving it to the Vandenberg base where it is tested under highly controlled conditions. In no way can this be considered a random operational test. In addition, between 1965 and 1968, the Air Force made four tests by firing a missile from a silo and destroying it after seven seconds. But only one of those four tests was completely successful.

Soviets have conducted more than 100 operational missile tests during the last ten years, including 50 tests during the last year alone. They know what their missiles can do, but we don't know what ours can do. There is no time to delay in finding out if our Minuteman missiles will work if we ever need them.

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