



## US Ballistic Submarine Program Under Fire

Justin Holcomb

March 17, 2016

On Wednesday, lawmakers and Pentagon officials met on Capitol Hill to debate the future of our ballistic submarine program and its capabilities in the coming decades. These weapon systems will cost the U.S. billions over the next two decades and democratic lawmakers are looking to reduce spending on the program.

"We are going to spend \$3.3 billion on every single one of the nuclear weapons. The question that we need to ask ourselves is are we prepared to send all of you on a mission of spending close to a trillion dollars over the next 25 years on revamping and rebuilding our entire nuclear arsenal and delivery systems?"

"The question is what are the really important things that we need to do?" asked Rep. John Garamendi, D-California. "Do we really need to replace the Minuteman IIIs with Minuteman IVs in the next 20 to 25 years? Do we really need to have a new, long-range cruise missile? Or can we delay that?"

Navy Secretary Ray Mabus weighed in and said, "You are going to have to look at this program in a national lens because if you drop this in the middle of a Navy shipbuilding budget, it will gut Navy shipbuilding for decades to come. And so the reason we are focused on how to do it, is to do it without damaging our conventional superiority as well."

Earlier this week, the Pacific-based nuclear ballistic-missile submarine USS Kentucky deployed for the first time since 2011.

Our ballistic submarines are so capable that in 2011, the Cato Institute called for keeping 12 nuclear submarines while eliminating the other two parts of the nuclear triad -- land based missiles and bombers.

According to [Cato's](#) "To Save the Submarines, Eliminate ICBMs and Bombers" article:

Instead of skirting the rules to find funds for the program, the Pentagon should look elsewhere within the nuclear arsenal for the money it needs. Eliminating the other two

legs of the nuclear triad — intercontinental ballistic missiles, or ICBMs, and nuclear bombers — would save American taxpayers around \$20 billion a year. Part of the savings could be put toward replacing the Ohio-class subs.

The sea leg of the nuclear triad by itself is a more powerful deterrent than that possessed by nearly any other nation in the world. Russia retains a relatively large arsenal, but no other country is capable of deploying more than a few hundred nuclear warheads. A single Ohio-class submarine can carry up to 192.

The bottom line is that out of control government spending causes even the most important programs to be put under public scrutiny. Ballistic submarines, something that I personally believe is our most vital weapon, must always be the first priority. We should constantly be advancing our capabilities in that realm and prove to the American people that we are doing so with competence.