

Madam Chairman, we currently only have a limited missile defense capability against limited threats. China is utilizing space for weapons testing, Iran is expected to have missiles capable of reaching the U.S. in less than 8 years, and now nuclear North Korea continues to defiantly test long-range missiles. Proliferation throughout the Middle East is rampant, and Osama bin Laden has stated, ``It is our religious duty to gain nuclear weapons."

Madam Chair, the first job of Congress is to protect this Nation, and because of the day in which we live, that includes an obligation on our part to ensure that the Department of Defense develops and deploys defensive capabilities that protect the American people and our warfighters against nuclear missiles, which remain the most dangerous weapons humanity has ever faced.

This bill cuts almost \$800 million in funding that would help close the critical gaps in our missile defense system.

One of the programs the majority believes is not worthy of the investment is the Airborne Laser. Madam Chair, the Airborne Laser is our primary and most mature boost-phase missile defense system. ABL is a speed-of-light technology that defends against enemy missiles in their earliest phase of flight, before they can initiate sophisticated countermeasures, before they can release multiple warheads, and while they are still on enemy territory.

The bill also takes \$160 million from the Missile Defense Agency's \$310 million request for the European site, which would defend United States homeland and our European allies and deployed warfighters against ballistic missile attacks from Iran.

Madam Chair, they completely eliminate even the small \$10 million budget for conceptual studies of a space test bed, which would give the United States the technology to defend space assets and defend against enemy missiles in their critical boost phase of flight.

We must, Madam Chairman, have access to space, and we must be able to defend our space assets. It is astonishing to me that this has become a partisan issue.

Madam Chair, if we build a truly robust, layered missile defense system in this country, the day may come when we will have to apologize to the American people for building a defensive system that proved to be unnecessary. But God save us from the day, Madam Chair, when we have to apologize to the American people for failing to build a system that could have protected them from the unspeakable nightmare of missiles turning American cities into nuclear flames.