COMMITTEE TO BRIDGE THE GAP

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Another Letter to Help the Year End

Dear Friends,

Nuclear Resurgence! The headlines blare the same news, over and over. After decades blocked from expanding because of concerns about accidents, proliferation, waste, terrorism, and cost, the nuclear dragon is rising again. Bridge the Gap helped kill off efforts this year to lift California's moratorium on new reactors, and now devote our efforts to fighting the national juggernaut. We are one of the few groups left in this fight, and we urgently need your help in this critical fight, because:

- Civil atomic enterprises spread the bomb. The same materials and technology can be used for weapons as reactors – witness Pakistan, India, North Korea, and the concerns about Iran.

- High level radioactive waste is dangerous for half a million years, and more than sixty years into the nuclear era we still don't have the foggiest idea how to safely dispose of it.

- A reactor contains a thousand times the long-lived radioactivity of the Hiroshima bomb, and the irradiated fuel pool has ten times the amount in the reactor. If the coolant is disrupted, by accident or terrorist attack, hundreds of thousands of people can die from the radiation immediately or from subsequent cancers. Yet reactors are not required to be able to withstand a 9/11-type plane attack, nor a ground attack by more than a handful of terrorists.

- Nuclear plants are hugely expensive, always coming in way over budget. The industry has successfully lobbied for massive taxpayer subsidies. Every dollar wasted on dangerous nukes steals money desperately needed for true solutions to the global warming crisis – sensible, safe renewables such as solar.

This is not a message governments or corporations want to hear. This year we lost several great and noble voices of caution about nuclear dangers who had repeatedly committed that unforgivable offense—being prematurely correct.

In the early 1960s, John Gofman was asked by the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) to establish a radiation research center at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in hopes that the program could be used to defend its nuclear projects from public fears of cancers caused by radiation. The problem was that Dr. Gofman's research led him to conclude that radiation was far more dangerous than the AEC was publicly conceding. Over AEC objections, he issued a scientific paper that showed that if the U.S. population received the level of radiation AEC regulations deemed permissible, large numbers of cancers would result. The AEC then slashed the budget of Dr. Gofman's center and essentially pushed him out of Livermore. He returned to teaching medical physics at UC Berkeley.

The controversy led to Congressional attention, which triggered the convening of a special committee of the National Academy of Sciences to judge essentially who was right about radiation. The Academy panel found that radiation was more dangerous than the AEC had claimed and that the risks were closer to those Dr. Gofman had identified. In the years since, there have been three more reports by the Academy, each finding radiation more dangerous than the previous one, each getting closer and closer to the estimates made by Gofman.

Over the years, Gofman published numerous independent books on radiation, all showing that the risks were greater than officially conceded. He warned that excessive use of X-rays and now CAT scans in medicine was causing a large number of unnecessary cancers, a conclusion confirmed in a major study in the *New England Journal of Medicine* that came out the day I am writing this. A day hardly goes by without further confirmation of his warnings. He was especially scathing in his criticisms of nuclear power.

We have recently lost another great figure in promoting reduction in nuclear risks--Paul Leventhal, founder and President of the Nuclear Control Institute. For two decades, Paul and Bridge the Gap worked shoulder to shoulder fighting to eliminate the use of weapons-grade uranium in research reactors and other locations where it could readily be stolen or diverted for bomb purposes, winning new regulations to minimize the use of such dangerous material. We worked closely together to require protection against terrorist attacks on nuclear power plants, gaining protections against truck bombs and continuing to push for protections against air attack. Paul was tireless and fearless, and his departure is a great loss to the movement to secure our world from nuclear dangers.

These losses follow that of another great friend several years ago, Dr. Theodore Taylor, a giant in the fight to prevent nuclear terrorism and proliferation. A former Los Alamos weapons designer (he invented the "backpack nuke"), he turned from the science of destruction and dedicated the rest of his life to showing how easy it would be to steal nuclear material and make a bomb, and how we had to tighten controls and stop this terribly risky enterprise. (More about Gofman, Leventhal and Taylor can be found on our website, www.committeetobridgethegap.org, which is a great way to keep abreast of CBG in the news and developments in the nuclear fight).

Now that we face the prospect of a nuclear resurgence, with all its inherent radiation, terrorism, and proliferation risks, one must ask the question: who will fight it? At the moment of the greatest need, we are losing some of our strongest voices; money from foundations to support nuclear work has dried up; and other groups have folded. But fortunately, the Committee to Bridge the Gap, with your support, is still in the midst of this struggle, winning victories. The only way to defeat this nuclear behemoth is for us all to step into the breach and take up the cudgels that our departed colleagues have had to put down. Bridge the Gap spends every day fighting the nuclear threat. Your financial support is crucial in this work, needed now more than ever.

May we rededicate ourselves to eliminating the nuclear threat,

Daniel Hirsch
President

Committee to Bridge the Gap is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization; contributions are tax-deductible.