

Senator Mark Begich Remarks
Ballistic Missile Defense
8 am; Oct. 21, 2009; Capitol Hill Club

Appreciate the opportunity to address you today.

Appreciate the diversity of this audience – from executive agencies and congressional staff to think tanks representing all perspectives on Ballistic Missile Defense.

Hope you didn't come expecting to hear from an expert. After nine months here in the Senate, I'm becoming a jack of all trades and a master of none.

Some of you may know my story. For those of you who don't I'm a pro-defense, pro-gun, pro-development, pro-personal privacy Democrat from one of the most conservative states in the country.

I'd like to think I've been successful in local government there and got here by fairly representing the widely divergent views of my constituents.

Today, I want to start the discussion on Ballistic Missile Defense from a perspective you may not hear often – from the northern perspective.

Those of us from Alaska view the world a little differently than our fellow citizens from what we call "Outside" with a capital O – the lower 48.

Our international orientation tends to focus westward toward Asia. After all, some Alaskans actually can see Russia from their front porch.

As mayor of Anchorage, I liked to boast that Alaska's largest city is within just nine hours of 90 percent of the industrialized world – with especially easy access to Japan, Korea, China and Russia.

Alaska's strategic military importance has been long recognized. Shortly after Alaska's purchase from Russia in 1867, the U.S. Army helped administer the new American territory.

Within 10 years, a significant presence was established in Alaska by both the Navy and U.S. Revenue Service, which later became the Coast Guard.

The Army helped provide law and order during the turn-of-the-century Gold Rush.

In 1935, Air Force General Billy Mitchell testified before Congress and famously pronounced - quote: "Alaska is the most strategic place in the world."

Sure enough, with the build-up to World War II, Alaska's vital role in the nation's defense grew dramatically. The Alaska Highway was constructed to bring military equipment to the northern front lines in Alaska.

Our nation's eyes and ears during this era were soldiers in the Alaska Territorial Guard, Eskimo men capable of living off the land who knew every crook and cranny of Alaska's coastline.

Today, some two dozen of these Scouts are still alive – most in their 80s and still living largely off the land through subsistence hunting and fishing.

As a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee and working with my colleague Senator Lisa Murkowski, I was able to ensure that service in the Alaska Territorial Guard counts for retirement purposes.

This means those Eskimo Scouts who dedicated many years to the active military after territorial service, finally will receive benefits and recognition for their sacrifices.

Right now, Alaska is home to about 30,000 active duty servicemen and women in every branch. We have Elmendorf, Eielson and Clear Air Force bases along with Army Forts Richardson, Wainwright and Greely.

These bases support the latest and greatest in the military's arsenal: the F-22, the Air Force's latest fighter aircraft, the C-17 and Ground-Based Midcourse Defense element of missile defense – also known as GMD.

As you all know too well, these are hot topics this year in Congress, the Administration, in the press and of course – in Alaska.

Because of this huge military presence in my state, I asked for assignment to the Senate Armed Services Committee when I came to the Senate in January. I'm the first Alaskan to serve there since 1968.

During my tenure on the SASC, I have vocally advocated for a strong ballistic missile defense policy – something I've always believed is vital to national security.

In particular, I've become the advocate for GMD systems located at Fort Greely in Alaska and Vandenberg Air Force Base in California.

Established in 1942 as a World War II Aircraft Lend-Lease stop-over point, Fort Greely is located in interior Alaska, just south of Fairbanks.

Fort Greely housed many tenants and missions until 1995 when it was listed for realignment under Base Realignment and Closure. This wasn't the last decision made with respect to this installation that would later be revisited.

In 2004, acknowledging the strategic location of Alaska and the proximity to rouge nations amidst the increasing threat, the Department of Defense, under the President's direction, began to build GMD systems at Fort Greely.

Beginning with Missile Field 1, six silos were constructed to house ground-based interceptors. This was the first field, originally built as a "test-bed".

It's now plagued with mold and electrical issues. The Missile Defense Agency plans to decommission the field sometime in the next few years and replace the capacity with seven silos in Missile Field 2.

Later, Missile Field 3 was built to house 20 interceptors.

And today, Missile Field 2 construction is underway for 14 more interceptors. Although, as we all know, how far the construction will go and how many interceptors will be emplaced has not yet been determined.

However, the previous plan – which was just a year ago - for 40 silos in Alaska, coupled with four silos in Vandenberg, meant a total 44 ground-based interceptors would defend the United States from an intercontinental ballistic missile.

In addition, with plans for a "third site" in Europe comprised of a single field of 10 ground-based interceptors, the United States was making robust investments in GMD to address threats to our national security.

However, the President's budget request for Fiscal Year 2010 changed all of that.

Termination of programs like the Multiple Kill Vehicle and Airborne Laser Tail Number Two, were easy targets for a defense budget cut. These costly programs were still in their experimental development phases and deemed to have limited near-term impact.

But deployment of ground-based interceptors – GBIs - was capped at 30, instead of the 44, thereby decreasing capability and capacity to protect the U.S.

Even more alarming, the Department did not request enough funds in the Fiscal Year 2010 budget to keep the production line healthy. Lack of sustainment funds and uncertainty in production schedules threatened the entire industrial base.

As many of you know, there were many differences in opinion in Congress about the impacts of these decisions national security. Not all of my Senate colleagues agreed with my assessment of the budget impact on GMD and ultimately, national security.

I've heard many seasoned Senators refer to the legislative and appropriations process as "making sausage." And they are right – how's it done is often not pretty, but what comes out in the end is what counts.

Despite the differences in opinion, there are several proponents of GMD on the Senate Armed Services Committee – in particular Senators Lieberman and Sessions and me.

We advocated for increased GBI sustainment, modernization and restoration funding, additional production and increased GMD deployment capacity. We also argued for making the administration commit to making proper investments in GMD in the future.

After all, no one could dispute the necessity for focusing on short and near range threats, but we couldn't ignore the risk to national security the budget impact on GMD would have.

I am reminded of a speech Ronald Reagan gave in 1983 to the nation on national defense. In his address, President Reagan said – quote:

"We maintain our strength in order to deter and defend against aggression -- to preserve freedom and peace.

He continued:

"Since the dawn of the atomic age, we've sought to reduce the risk of war by maintaining a strong deterrent and by seeking genuine arms control. 'Deterrence' means simply this: making sure any adversary who thinks about attacking the United States, or our allies, or our vital interest, concludes that the risks to him outweigh any potential gains.

Once he understands that, he won't attack. We maintain the peace through our strength; weakness only invites aggression" – end quote.

A lot has changed since President Reagan's speech. I am not sure that our adversaries today can be deterred by our strength alone. As you all know, proliferation of ballistic missiles by rogue nations has increased. We need protection and mitigation measures in addition to non-proliferation efforts.

My colleagues and I had to make a solid case for proper investments in GMD production, sustainment and infrastructure to maintain our strength against potential aggression.

There were many variables and post-budget decisions that played in our argument:

- First, the delivery of the Integrated Master Test Plan that called for procurement of an additional seven interceptors for testing;
- The decision to decommission one field as I mentioned earlier - Missile Field #1 - and proceed with seven silos in Missile Field 2;
- And of course, the decision to cancel Third Site and not deploy GMD in Europe, instead pursuing SM-3 development with an immediate focus on short to intermediate range threats while continuing 2-Stage GBI development.

These decisions further decreased deployment of GBIs in defense of the United States – losing a missile field and third site.

Or, simply said, they drastically increase the risk of an ICBM successfully hitting the U.S. Although, the need for additional GBIs for increased testing was a development that all agreed on.

But there were things that my Senate colleagues and I couldn't agree on.

During the process, some argued that the GMD system “does not work and enough are deployed to protect the U.S.”

But let's look at the facts. Since 1999, 13 tests have been conducted and eight have been deemed successful. Every test since 2006 has been a success.

The results speak for themselves. In a hearing earlier this year, General Cartwright – when asked about his level of confidence in GMD – said that he was 90 percent confident the system would work against a threat today.

But we all agreed that more testing was required to ensure the viability and modernization of the system to defeat threats.

In terms of the threat, we've all heard the Department of Defense say that the rogue nations do not have the capability to launch for an ICBM to hit the U.S.

At least, not yet, and not according to the most recent intelligence reports. Of course, even senior Department of Defense officials admit those assessments can be wrong.

We all know the actors involved who are waiting for the U.S. to let its guard down. North Korea and Iran continue to develop their ballistic missile technology and nuclear programs.

In fact, since the April announcement to reduce the number of GMD interceptors, North Korea has launched 21 ballistic missiles and conducted one underground nuclear test. One of these launches was of a multi-stage long-range Taepo-Dong II missile.

The launches last week of five short range missiles mean that 70 percent of North Korea's total ballistic missile tests since 1998 have occurred since April of this year – the month of the announcement to reduce our GMD numbers.

Iran also has increased its launch of ballistic missiles and has successfully expanded their range. Most disturbing is the quantity of short-medium range ballistic missiles being produced by Iran and the salvo launch capability.

Coupled with the continued development of nuclear technology, Iran continues to pose an increasing threat to its neighbors, the United States and its allies.

So my GMD proponent colleagues and I presented these facts to our colleagues. And we advocated for increased capacity to deploy GMD and adequate sustainment for the industrial base to decrease the risk of an ICBM attack against the U.S.

And as most of you know, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2010 contains several provision that strengthen GMD from what initially came out of the President's budget submission.

These actions include:

- An increase of \$20 million for sustainment of the vendor base;
- A sense of Congress that reaffirms support for protecting the U.S. against a ballistic missile attacks;

- The requirement of an assessment and plan for GMD to establishment of a sustainment and modernization program to ensure operational effectiveness throughout its service life;
- A prohibition against decommissioning of Missile Field 1 in Alaska until Missile Field 2 - its replacement - is operational to address capacity concerns;
- Requires the Secretary of Defense to ensure there is no break in GBI production;
- Requires a strategy and plan for ascent phase missile defense
- And finally, we require the Secretary of Defense to submit a comprehensive plan for developmental and operational test and evaluation of Ballistic Missile Defense.

These are provisions and investments included as a result of all advocates of GMD. Those who help make the sausage.

Although the bill strengthens GMD, much remains to be done to ensure we maintain peace and safety through our strength.

For instance, I have already called on the Administration to look at finishing all 14 silos at missile field two for flexibility to meet increased GMD deployment requirements, now and in the future.

These additional silos, which are already purchased, fabricated, and sitting in Oregon, would give the Combatant Commanders much greater flexibility.

I will be watching closely for the Ballistic Missile Defense Review (BMDR), which is due to Congress at the end of this year and because of the NDAA for Fiscal Year 2010 must include a specific analysis on GMD.

And I will be monitoring the Ascent Phase Intercept plan development. How much will this cost? Will it come at the expense of sustaining and modernizing GMD, as many new efforts this year have?

And is this effort to compliment GMD or ultimately replace GMD? What risk will be assumed by shifting to that strategy and abandoning GMD?

I will continue to call for rigorous testing. Testing must be funded and executed to ensure continued validation, modernization and reliability of the system. Confidence in GMD is dependent on testing.

We cannot rely solely on models and simulations testing now and into the future. Live operational testing, coupled with models and simulations, will be required to maintain a valid deterrent to our enemies.

Finally, I will be watching the Department's new "phased-adaptive approach" very closely.

As a steward of the taxpayer dollars, I will monitor investments in SM-3 to make sure that the technology matures to meet long-range threats or alternative options are pursued.

And I will ensure that the expressed commitment to Two-Stage GBI development and testing is carried through.

I appreciate your interest in this important part of our National Defense. I look forward to ensuring that our nation is prepared to defend against all threats today and into the future.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak to with you today.