Extension of Remarks
On the introduction of the "MX Missile Stand-Down Act"
Hon. Edward J. Markey (D-MA)
In the House of Representatives
August 2, 2001

Mr. Speaker, today, Rep. Tauscher and I are introducing the "MX Missile Stand-Down Act", a measure to take the 50 MX missiles off of hair-trigger alert.

Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld announced on June 27 of this year that the Pentagon would seek to dismantle these 50 MX missiles. Yesterday, the House Armed Services Committee passed by voice vote an amendment by Rep. Allen to the Defense Authorization bill to allow such dismantlement, which had been previously prohibited by Congress.

The bill we are introducing today augments these recent steps. According to a preliminary plan by the Air Force, these MX missiles would be dismantled over a 3-year timescale. What our legislation is saying is that there is no need to keep the balance of the silo-busting, heavily-MIRVed MX missiles in a state of ready launch during that time, and therefore we direct the Secretary of Defense to stand-down the MX missiles by removing their warheads over FY2002.

This is a simple but important step. Currently, the United States and Russia have a total of about 4,000 weapons on hair-trigger alert, ready to launch within a few minutes. This state of readiness is unnecessary a decade after the end of the Cold War. As then-Governor George W. Bush observed during the recent Presidential campaign on May 23, 2000, "[T]he United States should remove as many weapons as possible from high-alert, hair-trigger status. Another unnecessary vestige of Cold War confrontation, preparation for quick launch within minutes after warning of an attack was the rule during the era of superpower rivalry. But today for two nations at peace, keeping so many weapons on high alert may create unacceptable risks of accidental or unauthorized launch."

There is a real danger that a false alarm could lead to a nuclear exchange, as evidenced by episodes such as the 1995 incident in which the Russians mistook a scientific launch for an attack and began the process of responding. With the Russian early warning systems having deteriorated since that incident, the hazard is all the more plausible. Therefore, we also direct the Secretary of Defense to make yearly reports to Congress on the condition of the Russian early warning systems, as well as the inventory and alert status of the Russian nuclear arsenal.

This bill continues the process of confidence-building, making a definitive, material statement to the Russians that we do not wish to continue to maintain our nuclear weapons in high-alert and thereby encourage them to follow suit.