



LONG-TERM SECURITY FOR THE UNITED STATES STARTS WITH THE ICBM STATES

THE REAL COST OF ICBMS

image © Paul Shambroom

The “nuclear sponge” is shorthand for the five states—Colorado, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, and Wyoming—where U.S. intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) are based in underground silos.

But these states are much more than that. They’re hubs of transit, energy, and agriculture. They’re home to over 9 million people, millions of acres of tribal lands, endangered species, and some of the U.S.’ most recognizable landmarks. And, like the rest of the world, they’re facing the rapidly escalating effects of climate change, aging infrastructure, and the economic and health fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The U.S. plans to spend at least \$264 billion dollars on the Ground-Based Strategic Deterrent (GBSD) program over its life cycle. This program will replace the Minuteman III land-based nuclear missiles in the nuclear sponge states as part of the U.S. effort to modernize its nuclear arsenal.

Northrop Grumman, the sole bidder for and winner of the GBSD contract, insists that the ICBMs are an essential source of jobs for the states that host them. The Air Force has promised Montana residents thousands of new jobs associated with modernizing the missiles and the facilities that house them.

But with the same money it is investing in new weapons that security experts agree make it less safe, the U.S. can create more stable jobs to create more sustainable prosperity for the communities of the ICBM states, all while meeting Americans’ most urgent needs.



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THE REAL COST OF ICBMs

For six decades, the communities of the “nuclear sponge” have faced two challenges: living on the front lines of the U.S. nuclear deterrent, and relying on potentially unstable defense spending as a key source of community employment. Investing in the communities that surround the missile silos can create the conditions for stable long-term economic prosperity.

Clean energy, education, healthcare, and infrastructure are all proven to create more jobs than defense.

6.9

JOB'S CREATED PER \$1M FEDERAL INVESTMENT IN DEFENSE

12.7

AVERAGE JOB CREATION POTENTIAL OF CLIMATE, HEALTHCARE, EDUCATION, INFRASTRUCTURE PER \$1M FEDERAL INVESTMENT

PATH 1

CLOSE A BASE

- Reinvigorate the BRAC process with additional long-term funding to support transitioning defense communities.
- Work with existing community efforts to secure stable long-term economic prosperity.
- Ensure a safe and well-managed transition.

PATH 2

REPURPOSE A BASE

- Assign former ICBM bases a new mission.
- Look to other bases, such as Ellsworth Air Force Base, for insight into successful repurposing.
- Utilize military logistics by repurposing bases and other related facilities in ICBM states to serve as hubs for infrastructure renewal, climate change mitigation, or rural health centers.

PATH 3

CREATE A REGIONAL JOBS AUTHORITY

- Create a regional authority by agreement of city-, county-, or state-level authorities.
- Set up hubs for climate change mitigation, federal funding distribution, and economic development coordination.
- Share best practices with other regions contemplating major economic transitions.