

DEFENSE NUCLEAR FACILITIES SAFETY BOARD

Washington, DC 20004-2901



August 22, 2018

The Honorable Martin Heinrich
United States Senate
303 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Heinrich:

On August 15, I announced a reform plan for the DNFSB which will be effective October 1, 2018. My proposed plan was approved by a bipartisan majority vote of the Board.

In developing the reform, I was informed by a host of formal studies and informal observations and feedback from stakeholders. Among the formal reports: a December 2014 assessment by LMI consultants; an August 2015 analysis by Towers Watson associates; a report issued in October 2017 by the Office of the Inspector General for the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (who serves as our IG); and multiple recent years of Federal Employee Viewpoint Surveys. I also considered proposals offered by my fellow Board Members dating back to 2015. While each of these looked at our organization from a different perspective and together they offered a wide variety of observations and suggestions, the common theme was straightforward: my agency has not been performing well for some years and reform is needed. In the end, I considered all inputs, but the final proposal was uniquely mine.

The reform addresses three key elements. First, we will establish an Executive Director of Operations, a single leader of the staff, reporting to the Chairman, who will provide unity of command, accountability and strategic continuity. The current structure makes the Chairman, a political appointee, the leader and arbiter of multiple parts of the agency. Given that Chairmen come and go (we have had four Chairmen in the past four years, each with his or her own priorities, personalities and leadership styles), assuring stability of agency operations with a single EDO will considerably enhance the accomplishment of the mission.

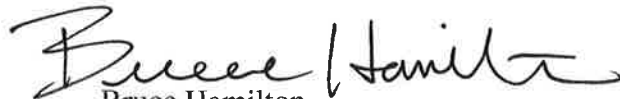
Second, we will re-structure our headquarters staff. Our current vertical structure, combined with the process burden, both formal procedures and cultural practices, that has developed over thirty years has resulted in a staff which, despite the superlative quality of the individuals themselves, has become lethargic and unresponsive to the needs of the Members of the Board. The new structure will be a more matrix-focused operation with fewer layers of administration to insulate the staff from the Board Members they serve.

Third, we will increase permanent staff presence at the defense nuclear facilities themselves. There is no better way to know the facts than to have boots on the ground. Under our current operating paradigm, oversight of many of the defense nuclear facilities are assigned to Washington, D.C. staff, most of whom have no field experience and who only see the facilities by traveling long distances and infrequently. Further, each defense nuclear facility is unique, creating a mandate for dedicated Resident Inspectors. Three of these new Resident Inspectors will be in New Mexico.

The plan establishes new Board-approved limits for federal staff. We must get back to basics and focus on functional reform, long-term sustainability, training, and development to improve our effectiveness in mission execution. In FY2019 we will limit our size to 100 positions (including Board Members). The Board has further directed me to manage hiring strategically for an eventual staff of 79. Given that our current staff numbers just 94 due to recent retirements and resignations, and the reality that we have turned over ~60% of our staff since 2014, I fully expect we will begin FY 2020 at or very near our target size through normal attrition.

Change of this nature is rarely easy or without controversy, and this case is no exception. In my view, though, and as endorsed by the Board, this reform will better equip the agency to achieve its mission. The outstanding individuals working in our agency, and the American public, deserve our absolute best.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bruce Hamilton". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Bruce Hamilton
Acting Chairman