

The Sound of Silence Project™

A project for U.S. Military Veteran Nuclear Weapons Technicians

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March 25, 2025

The Honorable [Recipient's Name]
[Title]
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Subject: Request for Review of Proposed Executive Order to Release Cold War-era U.S. Military Veteran Nuclear Weapons Technicians from Secrecy Obligations

Dear [Recipient's Name],

I represent *The Sound of Silence Project*, an advocacy group of approximately 32,000 military veteran Nuclear Weapons Technicians (and additional related titles) who maintained live nuclear weapons while serving in the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps during the Cold War period, designated as September 2, 1945, through December 26, 1991. Many of these veterans have long since passed, and we also honor their surviving family members.

I respectfully request that the attached proposed Executive Order be reviewed for subsequent consideration by President Trump. The Order addresses a long-overdue matter concerning Cold War-era Nuclear Weapons Technicians (NWTs)—a group largely unknown to the public—who remain under restrictive and ambiguous secrecy obligations decades after their service ended. It also formally recognizes their occupational exposure to ionizing radiation and toxic chemicals, ensuring they can seek the veterans' benefits they have been unjustly denied.

Background and Rationale

From the early years of the Cold War until its official conclusion in 1991, thousands of U.S. military personnel served as Nuclear Weapons Technicians. They were tasked with maintaining, disassembling, exchanging components, assembling, storing, and transporting all nuclear weapons in the custody of the Department of Defense. These veterans operated under stringent secrecy requirements and signed agreements that continue to restrict their ability to disclose critical aspects of their service—even for the purpose of seeking VA benefits, medical treatment, or providing closure to their families.

A February 13, 1996, Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) memorandum, *Exposure to Nuclear Radiation and Secrecy Agreements*, authorized certain veterans to divulge limited details regarding their involvement with nuclear testing. While it has been widely associated with Atomic Veterans, it failed to explicitly include Nuclear Weapons Technicians (NWTs)—who were not involved in nuclear detonations but instead worked directly with live nuclear weapons in maintenance and storage roles.

This oversight has led to confusion, fear, and unnecessary secrecy among thousands of veterans. Many still believe they are bound by secrecy requirements and oaths that, while legally questionable today, have been reinforced through decades of institutional silence. Their hesitation is well-founded, as no formal release has ever been issued.

Veteran Nuclear Weapons Technicians (NWTs) have lived under the threat of severe penalties, often referred to as the “20/20 rule”—twenty years in prison and a twenty-thousand-dollar fine—or even the death penalty for unauthorized disclosures. The cultural and legal ambiguity surrounding their secrecy requirements has had devastating consequences, including:

1. The dissolution of families due to an inability to explain details of their service, including the fact that they worked on nuclear weapons.
2. Veterans suffering in silence, unable to pursue and receive proper medical care or VA benefits because they believe their service details remain classified.
3. Countless veterans taking their “secrets” to the grave, leaving their surviving family members with no understanding of their service or potential exposures to ionizing radiation and toxic chemicals.
4. Most veteran Nuclear Weapons Technicians (NWTs) remain unaware that they were exposed to ionizing radiation continuously emitted through the surfaces of the live nuclear weapons they maintained, or from exposed radioactive components. Prior to the outreach of *The Sound of Silence Project*, it is estimated that only two to three hundred of the tens of thousands exposed had any real understanding of this hazard. The proposed Order would change that dramatically—empowering thousands of veterans to recognize possible links between their past duties and current illnesses, and to seek appropriate medical care and support services.

Necessity of the Proposed Executive Order

To resolve these longstanding issues, I have drafted a proposed Executive Order that:

1. Formally releases all Cold War-era Nuclear Weapons Technicians from secrecy obligations related to their past duties, ensuring they can disclose service details for family, medical, and other purposes.
2. Directs the Secretary of Defense and Secretary of Energy, in coordination with the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, to issue clear guidance and notifications to veterans

regarding their right to disclose information about their service. The only exception would be specific, unique information that remains classified beyond thirty-three years, depending on service dates—though this is arguably unnecessary, given the increasing public knowledge of nuclear science and nuclear physics.

3. Provides legal assurances that no veteran shall face criminal, civil, or administrative penalties for adhering to past secrecy agreements that are now lifted under this Order.
4. Clarifies that national security concerns remain protected, particularly regarding highly specific nuclear weapons technical data. Critical Nuclear Weapons Design Information (CNWDI) access—granted to an absolute minimum number of individual Nuclear Weapons Technicians—is a category of Restricted Data revealing the theory of operation or design of the components of a thermonuclear or implosion-type fission bomb, warhead, demolition munition, or test device. Specifically excluded from CNWDI is information concerning arming, fusing and firing systems; limited life components; and total contained quantities of fissionable, fusionable, and highly explosive materials by type. Among these excluded items are the components which DoD personnel set, maintain, operate, test, or replace.¹

A Matter of Urgency and Justice

Veterans who served as Cold War-era Nuclear Weapons Technicians are aging, and many have already passed away without ever speaking about their service. Some learned of the 1996 SECDEF memorandum only in 2023—decades too late—though its vague wording leaves most unsure whether it applied to them.

As recently as January 2025, I was informed of two additional Nuclear Weapons Technicians who passed away still believing they could never share their stories. The widow of another veteran contacted me and other veterans, seeking information after discovering documents in her deceased husband's stored military records. One veteran's daughter reached out to tell me her father passed away holding a note with my name, contact information, and *The Sound of Silence Project* written on it—a testament to the confusion, secrecy, and isolation these veterans and their families have endured for far too long. The hope they held onto must not have been in vain.

¹ DODI 5210.02 Access to and Dissemination of Restricted Data and Formerly Restricted Data, June 3, 2011, C2 8-21-18
<https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/DD/issuances/dodi/521002p.pdf>

Request for Action

I respectfully request that this proposed Executive Order be finalized and forwarded for the President's review and signature. This Order does not compromise national security but instead corrects a long-standing failure to properly notify and release veterans from unnecessary secrecy obligations that serve no purpose today.

Conclusion

This action would demonstrate a historic commitment to truth, justice, and respect for those who served in one of the most sensitive roles in U.S. military history. For decades, these veterans have honored their oaths of secrecy. Now, it is time for their country to honor them by granting them the right to speak openly, seek the care they need, and pass down their legacy to their families.

I am available at your earliest convenience to discuss this matter further and to provide any additional supporting documentation. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

/s/

Rick Workman

The Sound of Silence Project™

Fighting for Cold War Veteran Nuclear Weapons Technicians

Proposed Executive Order (v1.3 3-25-25): Releasing Cold War Period Veteran Nuclear Weapons Technicians From Secrecy Requirements; and Acknowledging Occupational Ionizing Radiation and other Toxic Exposures During the Cold War Period, September 2, 1945 – December 26, 1991.

By the authority vested in me as President of the United States by the Constitution and the laws of the United States of America, it is hereby ordered:

Executive Summary

Cold War period military veteran Nuclear Weapons Technicians (NWTs) played an essential but unrecognized role in maintaining the reliability, security, and effectiveness of the United States' nuclear deterrent. However, secrecy requirements, operational security measures, and a lack of formal acknowledgment of ionizing radiation exposure have prevented these veterans from seeking the recognition and veteran's benefits they've earned. This Executive Order authorizes the full release of these veterans from outdated secrecy restrictions, mandates government agencies to update policies recognizing their radiation exposures and ensures that they receive long-overdue justice and compensation.

Section 1. Background

(a) From the early days of the Cold War period beginning in 1945, through its conclusion in 1991, tens of thousands of military veterans served in the U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps as Nuclear Weapons Technicians (NWTs) under various synonymous titles.¹ They maintained all live nuclear weapons (approximately seventy-four different types) under Department of Defense (DOD) operational or custodial control on ships, submarines, and on land at locations throughout the world, ensuring the strategic stability of the U.S. nuclear deterrent.

(b) Their primary responsibilities included repairing, disassembling, exchanging limited-life components, assembling, transporting, and storing nuclear weapons. These tasks required direct physical contact, placing arms inside the nuclear weapons, head near or inside the openings, or otherwise placing their bodies against or in close proximity to radioactive weapon components.

(c) These responsibilities exposed NWTs to ionizing radiation emitted through weapon surfaces or from exposed components.² While exposure levels varied by weapon type, task, and location, secrecy and operational security prevented the disclosure of these dangers. The DOD used secrecy restrictions and sworn oaths to limit questions and withhold information about ionizing radiation exposure, leading to a widespread failure to inform and protect. Nuclear Weapons Technicians were also routinely exposed to toxic and carcinogenic chemicals and other hazards unique to nuclear weapons maintenance without adequate ventilation, respiratory, and other personal protection.

(d) Details about nuclear weapons duties, activities, and locations were frequently omitted from personnel records, apparently to avoid revealing the presence or absence of nuclear weapons at specific locations. As a result, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs routinely denied veterans' claims, citing a lack of radiation exposure documentation in personnel records.

¹ The Cold War period was established as September 2, 1945, to December 26, 1991, by the 1998 National Defense Authorization Act. <https://www.congress.gov/105/bills/hr1119/BILLS-105hr1119enr.pdf>

² Ionizing radiation: Four primary types include alpha, beta, gamma, and neutron. Ionizing radiation impacts the immune system, damages DNA cells in our body, and kills cells. <https://www.osha.gov/ionizing-radiation/background>, and <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8784945/pdf/nihms-1768466.pdf>

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(e) A February 13, 1996, Secretary of Defense (SECDEF) memorandum, prompted by a communication from then-Congressman—subsequent Secretary of Energy and Governor—Bill Richardson, authorized certain veterans to disclose details regarding nuclear testing for VA claims.³ However, this DOD memorandum was narrowly focused on nuclear test participants, e.g. “Atomic Veterans”. It failed to specifically acknowledge the occupational radiation exposures of Nuclear Weapons Technicians who worked on live nuclear weapons during the Cold War period.

(f) During a phone call on June 1, 2023, a retired veteran asked the late Governor Richardson why Nuclear Weapons Technicians were excluded from his initial request to the SECDEF, and in the subsequent release of the memorandum. His immediate and emphatic response was: “We didn’t know, we didn’t know, we just didn’t know!” Governor Richardson expressed deep regret and began assisting with proposed draft legislation before his passing on September 1, 2023.⁴

Sec. 2 Definitions. As used in this order:

(a) **Intrinsic Radiation (INRAD):** Ionizing radiation emitted through the [live nuclear] weapon surface or directly from exposed weapon components.⁵

(b) **Ionizing Radiation:** Electromagnetic radiation (gamma rays or x-rays) or particulate radiation (alpha particles, beta particles, neutrons, etc.) capable of producing electrically charged particles in its passage through matter.⁶

(c) **Nuclear Weapons Technician:** A military veteran whose primary duties and responsibilities included working on, with, or in close proximity to, nuclear weapons or exposed weapon components in DOD operational or custodial control.

(d) **Radiation-Risk Activity:** The routine duties of a military veteran Nuclear Weapons Technician, when working with live nuclear weapons during the Cold War period, constitute an occupational “Radiation-Risk Activity”, and each is considered a “Radiation Exposed Veteran”.

Sec. 3. Ionizing Radiation Exposure Without Knowledge or Consent

(a) Nuclear Weapons Technicians were not informed of the dangers of INRAD exposure, including the continuous ionizing radiation emissions, nor provided an opportunity to decline exposure. Operational secrecy prevented questions and suppressed concerns about radiation risks, leaving most technicians and supervisors unaware of the hazards they faced.

(b) Generally, Cold War period Nuclear Weapons Technicians worked without protective measures for radiation exposures, appropriate dosimeter monitoring, formal radiation dose limits, and radiation exposure management programs such as the “As Low As Reasonably Achievable (ALARA)” guidance redeveloped by the DOE in 1980, and the related INRAD safety program.

(b) **These technicians generally worked without dosimeter monitoring, formal radiation dose limits, or protective radiation exposure management programs** such as the As Low As Reasonably Achievable (ALARA) principle. The Air Force did not implement an ALARA and INRAD safety program until October 29, 1990, while, for example, the Army explicitly stated in a 1988 nuclear weapons manual: “Personnel dosimetry (film badge) is not required for personnel

³ SECDEF Memorandum, February 13, 1996, Exposure to Nuclear Radiation and Secrecy Agreements <https://omb.report/icr/201405-0704-002/doc/47643001.pdf>

⁴ Proposed draft bill: Cold War Veteran Nuclear Weapons Technician Ionizing Radiation and Toxic Exposure Act”. https://www.tsosproject.com/files/CWVNWT_Act_proposed_draft_bill_v11.2-21_Jan_24-rel.pdf

⁵ DOE-DTRA Technical Procedure (TP) 4-1, Glossary of Nuclear Weapons Material and Related Terms, IC 1-1, 30 July 2016; and AFR 122-28, AF Nuclear Weapons Intrinsic Radiation Safety Program, October 29, 1990.

⁶ Ibid. DOE-DTRA Technical Procedure (TP) 4-1.

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engaged in operations nor do the operations require keeping a record of exposure times. However, personnel should not stay within 1 meter of the M454 projectile any longer than is needed to accomplish each operation.”⁷ An apparent veiled acknowledgement of intrinsic radiation emitted through the exterior container. Navy personnel radiation exposure prevention, protection, and management programs were applied sporadically, lacked consistency, and remained incomplete.

(c) DOD prioritized nuclear operational readiness over personnel safety, resulting in thousands of veterans suffering disabling or fatal illnesses from unknown ionizing radiation exposure.

Sec. 4. Cold War Period Secrecy

(a) Nuclear Weapons Technicians’ tasks were conducted under conditions of extreme secrecy and silence. Secrecy restrictions and agreements were signed and placed in permanent records. These requirements prohibited veterans from discussing their job details, requirements, and (often) locations, with their families, physicians, and others.

(b) The existence of these veterans remains a little-known fact. They remain as unseen and unrecognized as ghosts. Many remain loyal to restrictive and ambiguous secrecy obligations—decades after their military service ended—literally taking their secrets to the grave.

(c) Details about their duties, activities, and locations were commonly omitted from individuals’ military personnel records to avoid revealing the presence of nuclear weapons at specific locations.

(d) Claims to Veterans Affairs (VA) for benefits—considering the secretive information necessary to substantiate and defend claims related to ionizing radiation exposure and specific dose—continue to constitute an exercise in futility.

Sec. 5. Veterans’ Benefits

(a) As a result of the information excluded from these veterans’ service records, the VA routinely denies their claims, often citing a lack of radiation exposure activities documented in personnel records, including dosimeter data.

(b) Title 38 U.S. Code, Veterans’ Benefits, does not classify the duties of Nuclear Weapons Technicians as a “Radiation-Risk Activity.” Consequently, they are not considered a “Radiation-Exposed Veteran” despite frequent, direct, and prolonged exposure to intrinsic radiation sources.

(c) The Secretary of Veterans Affairs relies on DOD radiation dose assessments (an inherent conflict of interest) for veterans who worked on live nuclear weapons. Worrisome facts evolved from the DOD/DOE Intrinsic Radiation (INRAD) Intercomparison Workshop, March 24-26, 1981, and subsequent INRAD program reportedly to assess ionizing radiation exposures to Nuclear Weapons Technicians. The assessments were based on inadequate and incomplete data, flawed methodologies, and limited or incomplete field observations and evaluations.

(d) Numerous challenges and failures memorialized in the 1983 Department of Energy Intrinsic Radiation Intercomparison Workshop Summary Report include:⁸

(i) “A review of over 20 years of data showed that, in general, measurements made at different times on any particular weapon type could differ significantly.”

⁷ Army Field Manual 55-204, Transport of M454 Atomic Projectile by US Army Aircraft, November 1980 through Interim Change 105, 29 August 1988, p. 3-1, 3-1a, Note. “*Personnel dosimetry (film badge) is not required for personnel engaged in operations prescribed in this manual, nor do the operations require keeping a record of exposure times.*”

⁸ Holt, J, et al. UCRL-53386, “Intrinsic Radiation Intercomparison Workshop. Summary report by the Weapon and Environment Sub-Group of the Intrinsic Radiation Working Group.” January 25, 1983, Lawrence Livermore Natl. Lab.

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- (ii) “As this report shows, all the causes underlying the measurement diversity are not yet clearly understood...”
- (iii) “...an unknown portion of the [gamma] measurement-range variability results in the various ways in which source energies and intensities are translated into dose rates...”
- (iv) “Regarding Neutron Sources: “It is difficult to judge instrument quality because the same type of instrument in the hands of different participants performed differently....”
- (v) “The range of results was excessive for warhead measurements.”

Sec. 6. Release from Secrecy Restrictions and Disclosure

(a) Effective immediately, all U.S. military veterans who served as Nuclear Weapons Technicians are hereby authorized to disclose information gained from military service during the Cold War period, September 2, 1945, through December 26, 1991, regarding:

- (i) Their military job title(s), unit(s), duty stations, and locations of service;
- (ii) General descriptions of their responsibilities in maintaining, transporting, handling, and storing nuclear weapons;
- (iii) The presence of ionizing radiation exposure risks and toxic chemicals they handled;
- (iv) The circumstances of their working conditions and related safety protocols, or lack thereof;
- (v) Testimonial or documentary evidence before government bodies or advocacy organizations; and,
- (vi) Any other unclassified information needed to substantiate medical treatment, and VA claims.

Sec. 7. Protection for National Security

(a) This Order does not authorize the release of specific Critical Nuclear Weapons Design Information (CNWDI) currently designated as restricted and not a candidate for declassification.

(b) The Department of Defense (DOD) shall, in coordination with the Department of Energy (DOE) as may be necessary, within 60 days, publish updated guidance ensuring that affected veterans understand their rights and specific unique limitations under this order.

Sec. 8. Directive to Federal Agencies

(a) The Department of Defense (DOD) shall:

- (i) Immediately recognize this Executive Order as an official declassification authority for Cold War period Nuclear Weapons Technicians;
- (ii) Establish a widespread outreach program to inform former Nuclear Weapons Technicians, and surviving family members, of their rights under this Order;
- (iii) Issue formal notices to all relevant personnel, clarifying that past secrecy agreements no longer prevent them from disclosing their duties during the Cold War period.
- (iv) Provide technical assistance to the VA in assessing claims arising from Cold War period radiation exposures.

(b) The Attorney General shall provide legal guidance and immunity assurances for veterans who previously believed they were legally prohibited from speaking about their duties.

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(c) The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) shall immediately recognize this Executive Order as an official authority for Cold War period Nuclear Weapons Technicians' assumed presumption of occupational "radiation-risk activity" and "radiation-exposed veteran"; also, assumed presumption of occupational "toxic exposure risk activity" and "toxic-exposed veteran".

Sec. 9. Revocation of Previous Ambiguities

(a) This Executive Order supplements and clarifies any previous memoranda or policies—including but not limited to the 1996 SECDEF memorandum—that focused on "testing" and failed to explicitly include Nuclear Weapons Technicians in secrecy releases.

(b) No veteran shall face criminal, civil, nor administrative penalties for previously adhering to secrecy agreements that have now been lifted under this Order.

Sec. 10. Implementation and Reporting

(a) Within 90 days, the Secretaries of Defense and Veterans Affairs shall submit a report to the President, detailing the implementation of this Order, including:

- (i) The number of affected veterans and surviving family members contacted;
- (ii) The number of VA claims processed as a result;
- (iii) Recommendations for any additional actions needed to fully recognize these veterans' service.

(b) The VA Secretary shall ensure compliance and accountability in implementing this Order and preventing any bureaucratic barriers to veterans' claims.

Sec. 11. General Provisions

(a) Nothing in this order shall be construed to impair or otherwise affect the:

- (i) authority granted by law to an executive department or agency, or the head thereof; or
- (ii) functions of the Director of the Office of Management and Budget relating to budgetary, administrative, or legislative proposals.

(b) This order shall be implemented consistent with applicable law and subject to the availability of appropriations.

(c) This order is not intended to, and does not, create any right or benefit, substantive or procedural, enforceable at law or in equity by any party against the United States, its departments, agencies, or entities, its officers, employees, or agents, or any other person.

(d) This Order shall take effect immediately upon signing. If any provision of this Order is held invalid, the remainder shall not be affected.

Signed this _____ day of _____, 2025.

[President's Signature]

This Executive Order ensures that Cold War period Nuclear Weapons Technicians can finally speak freely about their service, seek the benefits they deserve, and reconnect with their families without fear of violating outdated secrecy mandates. The silence must end, and justice must be served.