

Hawaii to modernize nuclear fallout shelters

By Niles Niemuth
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The Hawaii state legislature passed a resolution Friday calling on the Pentagon to assist the state in updating its disaster preparedness plans, including the upgrading of the state's network of nuclear fallout shelters. The resolution also requests that the military provide radiation survival tips in the event of a nuclear missile strike.

The legislature's resolution cites the threats by President Donald Trump to launch a unilateral attack on nuclear-armed North Korea as the main impetus for seeking to modernize Hawaii's nuclear war disaster preparations.

Reports in the US media have played up claims that North Korea is on the verge of developing missiles that can be loaded with nuclear warheads and reach the Hawaiian Islands or Alaska in less than 20 minutes.

The White House is recklessly ratcheting up tensions, with Trump promising to "solve" the supposed threat from North Korea and Vice President Mike Pence warning that the US "sword stands ready."

The carrier group anchored by the USS Carl Vinson is set to arrive in waters near the Korean peninsula on Tuesday, the same day, according to the US media, that Pyongyang may be planning to carry out a new nuclear test.

Hawaii's network of fallout shelters was built during the Cold War and has not been maintained since the mid-1980s, when state funding was cut.

The resolution calls for the identification of useable fallout shelters and the updating of shelters that are now obsolete. The fallout shelter plan for the island of Oahu was last updated in 1985 and food and emergency supply stockpiles have long since been discarded. Structures on the island previously identified as possible shelters include parking garages.

Oahu is home to Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, which hosts the US Pacific Fleet, considered the main target for a possible nuclear missile strike. The base is

located near the state capital and Hawaii's largest city, Honolulu, with a metropolitan area population of nearly 1 million.

Japan's surprise attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 triggered Washington's entry into World War II. Much of Honolulu would be devastated by a nuclear strike on the military facilities on Oahu, and depending on prevailing weather patterns, the neighboring islands would be severely affected by nuclear fallout.

"This is uncomfortable to think about, but we have a whole generation of people growing up that haven't ever really thought about these things, and they need to be educated about the reality and survivability and what we can do," Democratic Representative Matt LoPresti said at a hearing of Hawaii's House Public Safety Committee last week.

According to *Governing*, Toby Clairmont, executive officer of the Defense Department's Hawaii Emergency Management Agency, told lawmakers at hearings on the resolution that the Pentagon supported the state's initiative. He testified, however, that it would take years and significant levels of funding to update the fallout shelter plans for Oahu and the other islands. He added that establishing a new network of emergency shelters that could accommodate the current population was impractical, and insisted that any new disaster planning include instructions on how individuals could supposedly survive a nuclear blast and subsequent fallout in their own homes.

"The likelihood of government, whether it be the county, state or federal government, to be able to successfully shelter as large and diverse a population as we have in the timeframe we have—you are looking at a very low likelihood of that, even if you had all the funds in the world available," he said.

The "good news" for those fortunate enough to survive a nuclear blast in a fallout shelter, he continued, was that they would need supplies for only two weeks,

as dangerous radiation from the fallout would decay rapidly. This, of course, presumes the unlikely scenario of a nuclear exchange being limited to a single strike, killing “only” millions and avoiding the quick death of hundreds of millions in a wider nuclear war, leading to nuclear winter, the killing off of crops around the world and mass starvation.

“The bad news,” Clairmont glibly added, “is the detonation—very little warning. Wherever you stand, you go where you can, even if that means lying in the gutter in the street or crawling behind your car to see if you can survive that initial blast. It’s a grim scenario.”

At separate town hall meetings in Hilo on the Big Island on Tuesday, the senior US senator from the state, Brian Schatz, and US Congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard, both Democrats, sought to tamp down concerns sparked by the state legislature’s resolution and the lack of emergency planning, while taking an aggressive line against North Korea and criticizing Trump’s foreign policy from the right.

“I think that you should let me do the worrying,” Schatz told the audience. “I don’t think this should worry you every morning. There is not zero risk, but this is not the kind of thing we should be daily wringing your hands over. Where I do have a concern, is that the president has no plan at all when it comes to North Korea.”

The senator went on to declare his faith in Defense Secretary James “Mad Dog” Mattis to ward off a nuclear conflict. While not a “pro-peace guy,” Schatz said of the former Marine Corps general, he is “a grown-up and he does not want a cataclysmic, what they call a ‘kinetic endangerment.’”

When asked if Hawaiians should stock up on gas masks or build their own bomb shelters, Gabbard deflected the question, appealing to those in attendance to demand that the federal government construct a missile base in Hawaii to supplement Washington’s already extensive network of defensive and offensive missile bases.

She declared, “I am urging colleagues, our Hawaii delegation, our leadership in the state of Hawaii, and urging all of you to help raise voices as we try to get urgent action to make sure that the appropriate capabilities are in place for the defense of Hawaii in particular. This isn’t something we can take lightly.”

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