



President
Sylvester James Gates, Jr.
Brown Theoretical Physics Center,
Brown University

President-Elect
Frances Hellman
University of California, Berkeley
and Lawrence Berkeley National
Laboratory

Vice President
Robert Rosner
The University of Chicago

Past President
Philip H. Bucksbaum
Stanford University and
SLAC National Accelerator
Laboratory

Chief Executive Officer
Jonathan A. Bagger
American Physical Society

December 23, 2021

The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin III
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Mr. Secretary:

On behalf of the American Physical Society (APS) – the nation’s largest physics membership organization representing more than 50,000 members across academia, national laboratories, and the private sector – I’m writing regarding the current process for the Nuclear Posture Review (NPR). I recognize the vital importance of this Department of Defense process for national security and global stability and appreciate the efforts by you and your colleagues thus far.

As you know, the physics community has long been engaged with nuclear weapons and surrounding issues. Physicists played a critical role in developing nuclear weapons technology and were among the first voices to raise public awareness of their destructive potential and put forth proposals for nuclear arms control. Given the NPR’s importance to our community and the public more broadly, I respectfully offer suggestions aimed at enhancing the process’ public accessibility. This can have a most beneficial impact to garner support from our community as it gives voice in future public debates about this NPR. Simply put, APS could become an external validator in the public forum.

As outlined in [APS’s statement](#) on the use of nuclear weapons – originally adopted in 2006 – APS holds a long-standing position that there should be a full and informed public debate about the circumstances for use or threat of nuclear weapons whenever an administration reviews the nuclear posture. We welcome the initiation of the new NPR, and we suggest that the process for debating policy alternatives be made more transparent and inclusive. This could be achieved in a number of ways, including by providing for a variety of input by experts, including physicists, in an open setting – possibly a dedicated meeting or conference.

Additionally, we suggest that the process by which the NPR is developed be made more public. To help facilitate this goal and assure pertinent outside input is provided, the public should be informed which government agencies, government officials, external consultants, and contractors are involved in the process, as well as how input is solicited from Congress, the public, and independent experts.

As you know, members of Congress have sent a letter seeking clarification on the Nuclear Posture Review process. We understand that parts of the NPR process must necessarily remain classified, but to the extent possible, we ask that you consider our request, especially on policies related to the conditions in which the United States might use nuclear weapons.

Thank you for your consideration. If you or your designee would like to discuss this issue further, please do not hesitate to contact APS Director of Government Affairs Mark Elsesser (elsesser@aps.org; 202.662.8710).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sylvester J. Gates, Jr." in a cursive script.

Sylvester James Gates, Jr.
President, American Physical Society