



# MEETING WITH SENATOR VAN HOLLEN



By: Mike Keller, Max Kagiso,



**Friends,**

**Below is a write-up done by Mike Keller and me. You are welcome to edit it as necessary.**

**I will send Paul Warnke a thank-you. Enjoy the holiday.**

**Kagiso, Max**



## REPORT ON MEETING WITH SENATOR VAN HOLLEN ON NOVEMBER 13, 2019



Sixteen residents of Maryland representing Anne Arundel, Howard, Prince George’s and Montgomery Counties, as well as Baltimore City and the Eastern Shore participated in a 45-minute meeting with U.S. Sen. Chris Van Hollen and his aide, Paul Warnke on Thursday, November 13 at 110 Hart Senate Office Building in Washington, DC. Also present was Paul Kawika Martin, the senior policy and political director for the Peace Action national office. Following introductions, Van Hollen noted that “there are people from almost all parts of the state here”.

Jean Athey expressed thanks to Van Hollen for his support of several measures of interest to Peace Action and of other groups participating in the meeting. For example, she listed S-200, S-401 and his

co-sponsorship of the New Start Treaty extension.



**“We consider you a good friend on nuclear issues,” Jean said. “We need reinforcements,” Van Hollen responded. Jean spoke about the efforts of several Peace Action chapters and others to pass “Back from the Brink” resolutions in City and County Councils throughout the state. She also urged Van Hollen to co-sponsor S-272, which would adopt “no first use” of nuclear weapons as U.S. policy. Van Hollen replied that he is a co-sponsor of a measure that would require the president to obtain congressional approval before initiating a nuclear first strike. But he promised to “take another look” at the no-first use bill.**

**He mentioned that he has worked with Sen. Markey on similar legislation. He added that he was working on nuclear weapons issues in the 1980s before the Wall came down. There was a comment from a participant. Van Hollen responded that NATO forces felt they were overwhelmed by Soviet**

conventional forces. He added that he and others are working on non-proliferation by tightening up international agreements.

Lucy Duff said that U.S. nuclear arsenal weapons need to be taken off of a “hair trigger” alert, and she decried the plans to spend about \$1.7 trillion to “modernize” the country’s nuclear arsenal. “This is money that could be used to deal with climate change and economic security,” she said. She urged Van Hollen to become a co-sponsor of the Smarter Approaches to Nuclear Expenditures (SANE) Act. He informed the group that he was involved with SANE Freeze. He agreed to look at the bill, and agreed that the hair trigger is very dangerous.

She also called upon him to oppose funding for new “usable” nuclear weapons. Van Hollen agreed that we are spending too much on nuclear weapons.

Erinn Mansour urged Van Hollen to express support for the United Nations treaty to ban nuclear weapons. Van Hollen said that building grassroots support for this effort is vital. “We need to light a fire in other parts of the country,” he said. Van Hollen was of the opinion it is crazy to work on “usable nukes,” and there is no reason for another generation of ICBMs. Paul Martin urged him to sign the parliamentary pledge endorsed by ICAN. {This has been asked of Paul Warnke on at least two other visits.]

The senator indicated he is supportive of the goals of Back from the Brink , adding that resolutions are very important. He continued to offer his opinion. Unfortunately, in the Senate some of them should be voted out. Otherwise enacting legislation is very difficult in these times. So continue to build grassroots support.

Tony Langbehn asked about the repeal of the Authorization of the Use of Military Force. Van Hollen said that he was “100 percent with us”. He said that the House had included a repeal in the Pentagon spending bill, along with a provision that would require congressional approval before the president could initiate a war with Iran. But the Senate version of the bill does not contain these items. Jean asked Van Hollen if he would speak with Sen. Jack Reed (D-RI) who will serve on the conference committee which will consider reconciling the House and Senate measures. Van Hollen agreed but added that Reed would be a “hard sell”.

Van Hollen expressed concern about the status of the START Treaty, saying it will be “very destabilizing if the treaty is allowed to expire because it is the only major arms control treaty that is

still standing". He said that he is co-sponsoring a bipartisan bill that supports maintaining START. Van Hollen was told that continuing current arms control treaties was a priority for Peace Action.

Van Hollen was asked what the peace movement in Maryland and elsewhere can do to further its goals. "Replicate yourself in other areas," he said. He added that arms control issues used to have bipartisan appeal, but that is no longer the case. The political polarization in the country has made this much more difficult. "If we had a Democratic-controlled Senate and a Democratic president, that would make a big difference," he said.

In closing, Van Hollen informed us that he worked in Republican Senator Mac Mathias' office. In those days, there were Republicans that were better than some Democrats. That has all changed.

In a post-meeting briefing, Paul Kawika Martin noted that it is very rare to obtain such a long face-to-face discussion with a U.S. senator. An aide knocked on the door several times to inform Van Hollen that he had other business, but he rebuffed her and continued to give the peace community a remarkable amount of his time.