

Congressman Dennis Kucinich

Congressman Dennis Kucinich's Address to Congress Regarding H.R. 5987, Legislation to Establish a National Park in Honor of the Manhattan Project United States House of Representatives September 19, 2012

To my friend, Mr. Hastings, the technology which created the bomb cannot be separated from the horror which the bomb created. The celebration of the technology of the bomb bespeaks a moral blindness to its effects, which include not only the devastation of the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but the \$10 trillion Cold War between the U.S. and Russia and the tens of thousands of nuclear weapons which today hang over the world like so many swords of Damocles.

At a time when we should be organizing the world towards abolishing nuclear weapons before they abolish us, we are instead indulging in admiration at our cleverness as a species. The bomb is about graveyards; it's not about national parks.

The philosopher, Alfred North Whitehead once wrote:

The major advances in civilization are processes that all but wreck the societies in which they occur.

When you walk into the Bradbury Science Museum at the Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico, you're greeted on your immediate left by replicas of Fat Man and Little Boy, the two bombs that dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The space surrounding them does not include a picture of the leveled Japanese cities, pictures of children with massive birth defects, or stories of families and hundreds of years of history obliterated in the blink of an eye. It does not include a discussion of the health effects of worldwide distribution of radiation from the bombs or from the larger proliferation of nuclear technology that emanated from Los Alamos.

I am speaking about the Bradbury Science Museum. The bombs reside in a section of the museum called Defense, which presents information on the nuclear arsenal, the nuclear stockpile, plutonium, and explosives. Other sections discuss how nuclear energy works and how the bomb was triggered, how the bomb was triggered.

A substantive discussion of the myriad negative impacts of the technology that came out of the Manhattan Project is relegated to obscurity. A public forum tucked away in a corner provides space for public input.

When the U.S. dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August of 1945, more than 200,000 people were killed instantly. In the years that followed, over 100,000

additional people died of radiation poisoning. The Japanese people today continue to experience the devastating and long-term effects of the bomb.

It is now widely acknowledged by many top U.S. Government officials at the time of the war that dropping the bomb on Japan was completely unnecessary. I want to get into that section at this moment so that those who say, well, we need to create a memorial to the bomb because it ended the war, well, that's not true. I'm going to give you some quotes, Mr. Speaker.

This is from Dwight David Eisenhower, who was general of the armies and also, later on, President of the United States. He said:

“In July 1945, Secretary of War Stimson, visiting my headquarters in Germany, informed me that our government was preparing to drop an atomic bomb on Japan. I was one of those who felt that there were a number of cogent reasons to question the wisdom of such an act. The Secretary, upon giving me the news of the successful bomb test in New Mexico and of the plan for using it, asked for my reaction, apparently expecting a vigorous assent.

“During his recitation of the relevant facts, I had been conscious of a feeling of depression, and so I voiced to him my grave misgivings, first on the basis of my belief that Japan was already defeated and that dropping the bomb was completely unnecessary, and secondly because I thought that our country should avoid shocking world opinion by the use of a weapon whose employment was, I thought, no longer mandatory as a measure to save American lives. It was my belief that Japan was, at that very moment, seeking some way to surrender with a minimum loss of 'face.' The Secretary was deeply perturbed by my attitude.”

That's Dwight Eisenhower in a book called Mandate for Change, page 360.

From General Douglas MacArthur:

Norman Cousins was a consultant to General MacArthur during the American occupation of Japan. Cousins writes of his conversations with MacArthur:

MacArthur's views about the decision to drop the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were starkly different from what the general public supposed.

Cousins continues:

“When I asked General MacArthur about the decision to drop the bomb, I was surprised to learn he had not even been consulted. What, I asked, would his advice have been? He replied that he saw no military justification for the dropping of the bomb. The war might have ended weeks earlier, he said, if the United States had agreed, as it later did anyway, to the retention of the institution of the Emperor.”

That's from a book called The Pathology of Power, Norman Cousins.

Leo Szilard was the first scientist to conceive of how an atomic bomb might be made. That was in 1933. He speaks of a meeting with J. Robert Oppenheimer, the head scientist of the Manhattan Project:

Szilard: "I told Oppenheimer that I thought it would be a very serious mistake to use the bomb against the cities of Japan. Oppenheimer didn't share my views. Well, said Oppenheimer, don't you think that if we tell the Russians what we intend to do and then use the bomb in Japan, the Russians will understand it? They'll understand it only too well, Szilard replied."

Brigadier General Carter Clarke, who was the military intelligence officer in charge of preparing intercepted Japanese cables:

"We didn't need to do it, and we knew we didn't need to do it, and they knew that we didn't need to do it, we used them as an experiment for two atomic bombs."

This is quoted in Gar Alperovitz, The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb. Alperovitz, by the way, who did 30 years of research on the subject, said:

"I think it can be proven that the bomb not only was unnecessary, but known in advance not to be necessary."

Another quote. Henry H. Arnold, Commanding General of the U.S. Army Air Forces:

"The Japanese position was hopeless even before the first atomic bomb fell because the Japanese had lost control of their own air."

Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, Commander in Chief of the U.S. Pacific Fleet:

"The Japanese had, in fact, already sued for peace. The atomic bomb played no decisive part from a purely military point of view in the defeat of Japan."

The use of atomic bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki was of no material assistance in our war against Japan. The Japanese were already defeated and ready to surrender.

This is Admiral William D. Leahy, chief of staff to President Truman:

"Certainly, prior to 31 December 1945, and in all probability, prior to 1 November 1945, Japan would have surrendered even if atomic bombs had not been dropped."

That's from the U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey.

This is from Major General Curtis LeMay:

“The war would have been over in 2 weeks without the Russians entering and without the atomic bomb. The atomic bomb had nothing to do with the end of the war at all.”

Now it's just not disputable that this technology was not necessary. So let's go back to the creation of a national park and the naming of the park after the Manhattan Project.

We have to now ask ourselves, since it can be widely disputed--and by top military officials--that the dropping of the bomb was not necessary, then why are we honoring this technology with a national park? It's really a legitimate question.

When the U.S. dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August of 1945, again, 200,000 people were killed. And to have this discussion in the context of honoring a technology that created a bomb, I think, really raises questions about where we are with this country and where we are with the bomb. The splitting of the atom and the use of the split atom to create an atomic bomb actually bespeaks a split consciousness in this country. It was, in a sense, an intensification of dichotomized thinking, of us versus them, whoever they are. We then decided that all of our problems in humanity could be solved by technology, that the bomb then was put in place of reason, that the bomb was put in place of diplomacy, that the bomb was put in place of talking with each other and settling our differences. No, the bomb then became the metaphor for how technology rules over humanity. We're captives of our own machines.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I remember as a young person going to elementary school and that children would have to do drills called duck-and-cover because we believed that the United States was going to be targeted by nuclear weapons launched by the Soviet Union. The fear drove an entire generation's dreams. The fear caused the United States to spend trillions of dollars on a Cold War that took away from the needs of the people. The fear resides in the world today when there are some who urge an attack on Iran. Why? Because they are said to be developing a nuclear weapon.

Where does this stop? We cannot honor this technology. We cannot celebrate ingenuity that was used to put all of humanity at risk. We have to begin to reassess who we are as human beings and ask ourselves whether or not we have essentially reached the limits of our ability to develop technology which we can control.

And it's not only about nuclear weapons. When you learn that the globe itself is experiencing tremendous upset because of the human activity, when you learn that science can now create genetically modified organisms that can change the nature of food. As a matter of fact, life itself can be changed through cloning. We act as these mini gods who can endlessly tinker with our planet and life itself and then name parks after it. No.

In the scheme of things, someone will say, Dennis, this is just a park. What are you getting so excited about? This is about naming a new national park after the Manhattan Project. And we have to just stop and reflect on where this takes us. There should be a

discussion about the full legacy of the Manhattan Project, including its devastating effects upon the Japanese people and upon the rest of the world.

If there was going to be a new park, it should serve as a solemn monument to Japanese American friendship that rose from the ashes and the worldwide work for nuclear disarmament that continues to this day, rather than a celebration of a technology that has brought such destruction to the world. Failure to recognize this dimension, even in its first iteration, really is a significant injustice.

I looked at the CRS report on this, and there's no mention of how this is going to be framed or phrased. The museum at Los Alamos is a celebration of the triumph of technology over humanity. It's a powerful illustration that we're developing technology at a rate that far exceeds our ability to manage it. Now we are faced with the choice to memorialize this point of view into a national park.

In the last 4 1/2 minutes I want to read a poem by Henry Reed. He juxtaposes in this poem Japan before the dropping of the bomb and the technical aspects of the bomb itself.

It's called "The Naming of Parts":

Today we have the naming of parts. Yesterday, we had daily cleaning. And tomorrow morning, we shall have what to do after firing. But today, today we have the naming of parts. Japonica glistens like coral in all of the neighboring gardens, and today we have naming of parts.

This is the lower sling swivel. And this is the upper sling swivel, whose use you will see when you are given your slings. And this is the piling swivel, which in your case you have not got. The branches hold in the gardens their silent, eloquent gestures, which in our case we have not got.

This is the safety-catch, which is always released with an easy flick of the thumb. And please do not let me see anyone using his finger. You can do it quite easily if you have any strength in your thumb. The blossoms are fragile and motionless, never letting anyone see any of them using their finger.

And this, you can see, is the bolt. The purpose of this is to open the breech, as you see. We can slide it rapidly backwards and forwards: we call this easing the spring. And rapidly backwards and forwards. The early bees are assaulting and fumbling the flowers: They call it easing the spring.

We're naming a park today. Yesterday we had the naming of parts, and not just Japan but our humanity was obliterated. Do we get a chance to reclaim it?