

Features

Washington Against Nuclear Weapons: Building a Statewide Movement

By Lilly Adams

Did you know that over 1,000 nuclear weapons are housed about 20 miles from Seattle, on Hood Canal? In fact, if Washington State were its own country, it would be the third largest nuclear weapons country in the world. As a Shoreline native, I never heard about this until I started working with Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility (WPSR), where I now run our anti-nuclear weapons program.



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Our organization was started during the Cold War by a group of health professionals who recognized that there is no possible response to the use of nuclear weapons, no way to address their catastrophic health impacts. Our guiding principle has always been that we must prevent what we cannot cure.

A main part of my job is coordinating a statewide coalition, Washington Against Nuclear Weapons (WANW). Our coalition formed nearly two years ago to fight against some disturbing realities:

- The US currently has roughly 6,500 nuclear weapons, enough to end all life on the planet many times over.
- We're set to spend \$1.7 trillion over the next 30 years rebuilding our entire nuclear arsenal, making our weapons even deadlier. This comes out to \$4.6

million every single hour.

- This Administration is planning to make new, unnecessary nuclear weapons, expanding the situations in which we might use them, and completely sidelining nuclear disarmament.
- In Washington State, the process of nuclear weapons production has hurt our communities, especially communities of color, in places like the Hanford Nuclear Site and Midnite Mine on the Spokane Tribe of Indians reservation.

Between conflicts with North Korea and pulling out of the Iran Deal, this has been a wild year for nuclear weapons issues. But thankfully, the majority of the world's nations understand that these weapons are inhumane and

have no place in our society. Though the US is engaging in dangerous nuclear weapons policy and rhetoric, the rest of the world is moving in a more positive direction.

In July 2017, the United Nations passed the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, with 122 countries voting in favor. This treaty prohibits the use, possession, and development of nuclear weapons, and aims to move the world towards a nuclear-free future. It also explicitly frames this issue as a women's issue, stating that "the catastrophic consequences of nuclear weapons have a disproportionate impact on women and girls, including as a result of ionizing radiation." Though the US has boycotted this entire process, our coalition is standing strongly in support of this treaty. We were also very encouraged to find out

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that the League of Women Voters has a strong and detailed national position against nuclear weapons, which includes supporting the abolition of these weapons.

Over the past two years, WANW has grown to include nearly 40 organizations in communities all across the state, from Spokane to the Olympic Peninsula. We represent peace activists, environmentalists, social justice organizations, faith leaders, educators, labor groups, and more. We're building a movement against nuclear weapons through a variety of activities:

- Raising awareness of these issues through educational events and projects
- Meeting with members of Congress to influence policy (we've held over 50 meetings since we formed!)
- Taking grassroots actions, such as letter-writing campaigns to elected officials, to show that constituents and voters care about this issue.

Right now, we are working on getting every Congressional candidate in 2018 to take a public position on nuclear weapons issues, through a candidate survey and by asking questions at candidate forums. We're also working on a resolution against nuclear weapons, to be voted on by the Washington State Legislature. Another important part of our work is simply continuing to grow the coalition—we're always looking for new organizational members and activists. If you'd like to join us, you can contact me at lilly@wpsr.org to talk more.

You can learn more at our website: www.wanwcoalition.org. Under the "Get Involved" section, you can also sign up to receive weekly emails to stay updated, or sign up an organization you're a part of to become a coalition member organization. We hope you will join us in working to ensure that nuclear weapons are never used again.

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