Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

October 3, 2017

The President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

We write to urge you to adopt a strong, strategic and steady policy toward North Korea, whose rapidly advancing nuclear and missile capabilities threaten the United States and our allies.

We acknowledge two fundamental points. First, North Korea's dangerous and destabilizing actions, in defiance of U.N. Security Council resolutions dating back to 2006, are the root cause of tensions between North Korea and the international community. Nevertheless, we believe your rhetoric in response has been counterproductive, escalating an already-dangerous situation. Second, while North Korea has been described as "the land of lousy options," we believe the U.S. can maximize the chance of success by charting a careful course that avoids capitulation to, or catastrophic war with, North Korea.

In our view, U.S. strategy toward North Korea should be guided by the following principles.

- **Increase Economic Pressure on North Korea Through the Imposition and Effective Enforcement of Sanctions**

U.S. and international economic sanctions on North Korea should be calibrated to make it harder for North Korea to import the technology and acquire the hard currency necessary to advance its nuclear and missile programs. They should also be tailored to produce sufficient economic hardship, particularly among the regime's elites, to cause Kim Jong-un to conclude that the cost of these programs outweigh their benefit and—accordingly—to choose negotiation over aggression. While U.S. and U.N. sanctions were recently strengthened, we believe there is room for more serious and sustained economic pressure on North Korea in an effort to change its strategic calculus.

While multilateral agreement to *impose* sanctions requires a significant diplomatic commitment, effective *enforcement* of sanctions involves even more time and resources. Far more should be done to ensure that other nations, including but not limited to China, are fulfilling their legal obligations. If a country has the will but not the ability to enforce sanctions against North Korea, the U.S. should offer technical or financial assistance. Conversely, if a country possesses the capacity but not the desire to implement sanctions, American officials should make clear to that country that it risks a fundamental breach in our bilateral relationship. The U.S. intelligence community, the Department of the Treasury, and the Department of State should monitor, address and—where appropriate—penalize non-compliance in accordance with U.S. sanctions law.

- **Enhance U.S. Diplomatic Efforts, Especially Crisis Management Channels**

Tough, principled diplomacy with North Korea is not a concession or sign of weakness. President Reagan negotiated with the Soviet Union at the height of the Cold War. Whether North Korea is prepared to

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negotiate an enduring and verifiable suspension of its nuclear and missile programs in exchange for sanctions relief is up to Pyongyang. But the United States should always be ready and willing to talk without preconditions.

In the interim, the U.S. must establish effective crisis-management channels with North Korea to clarify intentions and minimize the risk of miscalculation. When the U.S. communicates clearly and consistently to an adversary, it makes it less likely that the adversary will intentionally or inadvertently begin a conflict.

- **Strengthen, Don't Subvert, Alliances in East Asia**

At his confirmation hearing, Secretary of Defense James Mattis stated: "History is clear: nations with strong allies thrive and those without them wither." We are concerned that U.S. alliances in East Asia, particularly our security and economic partnership with South Korea, are being mismanaged. After North Korea's latest nuclear test, we were discouraged to see you accuse South Korean President Moon of "appeasement" toward North Korea, a claim as untrue as it is unhelpful.

Furthermore, while we have a range of views on the 2012 U.S.-Korea Free Trade Agreement, we believe that now is the wrong time for the administration to engage in loose talk about unilateral withdrawal from the agreement. Kim Jong-un seeks to undermine the relationship between the U.S. and South Korea and to cause South Korea to question the credibility of our commitments. We should stand steadfast with our allies, not further Kim's efforts to divide us.

- **Recognize that Personnel is Policy**

We are disappointed that, eight months into your tenure, key policymakers needed to craft and carry out U.S. strategy in East Asia are not in place. At the Department of State, you have yet to nominate an individual to serve as Assistant Secretary in the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, U.S. Ambassador to South Korea, or Under Secretary for Arms Control and International Security. At the Department of Defense, you have not nominated an individual to serve as Assistant Secretary for Asian and Pacific Security Affairs or appointed an individual to serve as Deputy Assistant Secretary for East Asia. These are self-inflicted wounds. We urge you to swiftly nominate or name qualified individuals to these critical positions.

- **Maintain Deterrence and Defense**

For nearly 65 years, U.S. leadership, military presence, and engagement with allies have prevented another devastating conflict on the Korean peninsula. While Kim Il-Sung, Kim Jong-Il, and now Kim Jong-un have acted aggressively, each has concluded that a direct attack on the U.S. or our allies would produce unacceptable consequences for the regime. The U.S. must continue to impart this message to North Korea through a variety of means, including by enhancing defensive systems and bolstering defense cooperation and intelligence sharing with South Korea and Japan.

Rather than using reckless rhetoric and sending muddled messages to our allies, the U.S. should pursue a comprehensive strategy toward North Korea that consists of economic pressure, strong and steady diplomacy, and credible deterrence and defense.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Murphy
Member of Congress

Seth Moulton
Member of Congress

Jimmy Panetta
Member of Congress

Rick Larsen
Member of Congress

Donald Norcross
Member of Congress

Sanford D. Bishop, Jr.
Member of Congress

Ed Perlmutter
Member of Congress

Madeleine Z. Bordallo
Member of Congress

Frank Pallone, Jr.
Member of Congress

Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan
Member of Congress

Gene Green
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Gregory W. Meeks
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Jackie Speier
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Lisa Blunt Rochester
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Suzanne Bonamici
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Thomas R. Suozzi
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Marcy Kaptur
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Jacky Rosen
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Carol Shea-Porter
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André Carson
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James P. McGovern
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John K. Delaney
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Tom O'Halleran
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Julia Brownley
Member of Congress

Ami Bera
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Jan Schakowsky
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Alcee L. Hastings
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Grace Meng
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Dwight Evans
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Ann McLane Kuster
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Jared Polis
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Peter Welch
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Judy Chu
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Lois Frankel
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Lloyd Doggett
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Vicente Gonzalez
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Marc Veasey
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Jared Huffman
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Scott Peters
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Jim Langevin
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Val Butler Demings
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Steve Cohen
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Daniel W. Lipinski
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John Conyers, Jr.
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Ruben Gallego
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Rosa L. DeLauro
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Tim Ryan
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David N. Cicilline
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Ted Deutch
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Joseph Crowley
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