

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 30, 2025

The Honorable Pete Hegseth
Secretary
U.S. Department of Defense
1400 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1400

Dear Secretary Hegseth:

Director Kathryn Bigelow's new thriller, *A House of Dynamite*, dramatizes the terrifying 30-minute window between the launch of a nuclear-armed missile bound for the United States and its impact. The film shows U.S. interceptors attempting, and failing, to knock down the incoming warhead and suggests that the system has only a 50-50 chance of success. Your Department of Defense is now claiming that the movie is inaccurate and that missile defenses have a much higher success rate. But the public record supports the conclusion that the movie is accurate and that your department is being dishonest by mischaracterizing the test results. But the public record supports the conclusion that the movie is accurate and that you are dishonestly mischaracterizing the test results. Given the gravity of these issues, I urge you to provide accurate information to the public on missile defense and to not traffic in misinformation for political gain.

A House of Dynamite depicts U.S. Ground-based Midcourse Defense (GMD) interceptors launching and failing to stop an incoming intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM). "So, it's a f---ing coin toss? That's what fifty billion dollars buys us?!" exclaims the frustrated Secretary of Defense. In fact, yes. According to the Washington Post: "In the 20 tests conducted since 1999 . . . the kill vehicles have missed their targets about as often as they've hit them, succeeding just 55 percent of the time, according to a report by the American Physical Society, a scientific nonprofit."¹ Moreover, these tests have been woefully unrealistic, with known targets, no realistic decoys, and perfectly timed launches.² The tests have been scripted for success; even so they fail regularly.

Given the film's consistency with the public record, it was surprising to read that the Pentagon is disputing the movie's accurate depiction of the GMD system's past performance. According to Bloomberg, the Missile Defense Agency (MDA) is claiming in an October 16, 2025 internal memo that interceptors "have displayed a 100% accuracy rate in testing for more than a decade."³

¹ Christian Davenport, William Neff, & Aaron Steckelberg, *Inside Trump's Golden Dome: High-Stakes Debate Over Missile-Defense Shield*, Wash. Post (Oct. 29, 2025),

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/interactive/2025/missile-defense-star-wars-golden-dome-trump/>.

² *Id.*

³ Anthony Capaccio, *Pentagon Frets over 'A House of Dynamite' Nuclear Doomsday Film*, Bloomberg (Oct. 25, 2025), <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2025-10-25/-house-of-dynamite-nuclear-missile-defense-fail-has-pentagon-worried>.

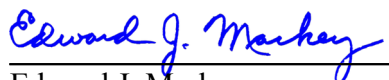
Unfortunately, this rosy assessment would appear to have everything to do with misleading the public and nothing to do with providing accurate information. MDA is apparently following the lead of President Trump who also exaggerates the success of missile defenses, promising that his Golden Dome system will be nearly perfect, “forever ending the missile threat to the American homeland.”⁴ Pentagon and White House officials have a long history of overstating the effectiveness of the GMD system.⁵

So, in the spirit of providing accurate information to the public, I request that you respond to the following questions in writing by November 15, 2025:

1. What is the test record of the GMD system over the last 30 years? Please include successes, near-successes and failures, and intercept and non-intercept tests.
2. What data supports the MDA claim that GMD tests “have displayed a 100% accuracy rate in testing for more than a decade”?
3. In what ways are GMD tests as close as possible to real-world engagements, and in what ways are they not?
4. Please provide plans for testing of the GMD system over the next five years.

When it comes to nuclear war and how to avoid it, the public needs accurate information. The last thing we should do is build false hope in the public’s mind that missile defenses will protect them. It’s irresponsible to say the GMD system will provide effective protection when the Pentagon does not have the information to back that up. Americans deserve better.

Sincerely,


Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

⁴ Christian Davenport, William Neff, & Aaron Steckelberg, *Inside Trump’s Golden Dome: High-Stakes Debate Over Missile-Defense Shield*, Wash. Post (Oct. 29, 2025),

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/interactive/2025/missile-defense-star-wars-golden-dome-trump/>.

⁵ Union of Concerned Scientists, *Shielded from Oversight: The Disastrous US Approach to Strategic Missile Defense* (July 15, 2016), <https://www.ucs.org/sites/default/files/attach/2016/07/Shielded-from-Oversight-appendix-9.pdf>.