

CONGRESS'S SDI CUTS DESERVE A BUSH VETO

The House and Senate Armed Services Committees recently completed drafting the fiscal 1990 Defense Authorization Bill, and the Strategic Defense Initiative budget again is being drastically cut. While the committees' actions represent only the first round in what is certain to be a long, drawn-out legislative battle, it is now clear that George Bush will have to fight congressional efforts to reduce SDI funding. If Bush wants an effective SDI program that will provide him with realistic options for both a near-term SDI deployment and more advanced follow-on systems, he must prevail upon Congress not to gut the SDI program through funding reductions. Prevailing in Congress will require that Bush threaten to veto the Defense Authorization Bill if it does not provide something close to the \$4.6 billion requested by the Administration for SDI.

Disruptions and Layoffs. The House Armed Services Committee was the first to act on Bush's defense request. Last June 27, the Committee reduced the \$4.6 billion SDI budget by \$1.1 billion. The full House is scheduled to take up the bill next week and preliminary indications are that it may adopt an amendment to cut an additional \$700 million from the SDI budget. It is expected that the funds will then be transferred to drug and environmental programs. This amendment would devastate the SDI program by disrupting ongoing research efforts, causing huge layoffs of scientists and engineers working on the program and slowing progress on research, development, and testing to a snail's pace.

The Senate Armed Services Committee completed action on its version of the Defense Authorization Bill on July 14, voting to reduce the SDI budget by \$366 million. While this cut is not nearly so draconian as that imposed by the House Armed Services Committee, the House-Senate conference on the Defense Authorization Bill, which will take place this fall, likely will produce a final SDI budget figure that is well below the Senate figure.

Halving the Budget. The SDI budget already has suffered severe funding reductions during the last five years. The Reagan Administration's original funding plans for SDI called for \$26 billion for the program during its first five years. SDI has received only half of this planned funding (or \$13 billion). Further, Bush himself reduced Ronald Reagan's \$5.6 billion for SDI funding in fiscal 1990 by \$1 billion earlier this year. If the House votes to provide the SDI program only \$2.8 billion, as anticipated, it will constitute a full 50 percent reduction from the amount originally planned for SDI in fiscal 1990. Taken together, cuts of this magnitude will certainly delay and eventually cripple the effort to develop and deploy strategic defenses.

Wreaking Havoc. The prospect of additional SDI budget cuts in Congress has so alarmed the Director of the Strategic Defense Initiative Organization, Lt. General George L. Monahan, that he wrote an editorial in the July 14th *Washington Times* arguing against such cuts. Stated Monahan, the House Armed Services Committee cuts, even without those anticipated in next week's floor action, "would be devastating and wreak havoc" on the SDI program. Monahan also warns that the funding reduction will prevent the program from meeting its objectives.

Cutting the current SDI budget request by 25 percent, for example, as already done by the House Armed Services Committee, would mean failing to achieve the fundamental goal of making an informed decision on deployment within four years, as planned from the very beginning of the program. Such cuts also would mean terminating most allied cooperative programs, cancelling or drastically slowing advanced laser projects, and reducing the national work force currently planned for fiscal 1990 SDI research by more than 8,000. Finally, budget reductions of this magnitude would not only delay deployment of strategic defenses to well after the year 2000, but do so with no provisions for laser weapons and other advanced systems to offset Soviet countermeasures to the first-phase strategic defenses already deployed by the U.S.

Time to Fight for SDI. If Bush wants an SDI program that will lead eventually to the deployment of strategic defenses, he must fight for it now in Congress. Indications are that Bush supports SDI. He recently signed a presidential order, National Security Directive 14, stating that national security requires a strong SDI program. SDI supporters on Capitol Hill, however, seem at a loss to explain why Bush has not forcefully condemned the proposals to cut SDI funding.

Given what has already taken place in Congress, Bush's only real hope for salvaging his SDI budget is to promise to veto the Department of Defense Authorization Bill if SDI funding is drastically cut. Bush himself recommended to Reagan last year that the Pentagon budget be vetoed if SDI funding was greatly reduced by Congress. A veto strategy requires that Bush now start threatening to veto the Department of Defense Authorization Bill unless it approximates his funding request of \$4.6 billion for the SDI program. This approach will give him the bargaining leverage he needs to prevail in Congress. Bush's willingness to stand up to Congress is a test of his leadership and his support for the program.

The veto strategy recommended by Bush as Vice President was successful. It is now time that Bush as President follow his own advice.

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Steven A. Hildreth, "The Strategic Defense Initiative: Issues for Phase I Development," Congressional Research Service *Issue Brief* IB88033, January 4, 1989.

Statement of Lt. General George L. Monahan, Director of the Strategic Defense Initiative Organization, before the Senate Subcommittee on Defense Appropriations, May 11, 1989, with annex.

Lt. General George L. Monahan, "SDI's Hour of Financial Need," *The Washington Times*, July 14, 1989.