

Bob Dole



**NEWS
FROM:**

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SENATE REPUBLICAN LEADER**

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DEFEND AMERICA ACT

**DOLE SETS THE RECORD STRAIGHT ON NATIONAL MISSILE DEFENSE;
DOUBLE-TALK FROM CLINTON ADMINISTRATION AND CONGRESSIONAL ALLIES
MUST NOT PRECLUDE OPEN DEBATE**

It is unfortunate that we need to vote on a motion to proceed to legislation dealing with an issue so critical to America's future as national missile defense.

In his speech to the Coast Guard Academy, the President stated that he supports missile defense. Yet, today I expect that a majority of the other side of the aisle -- at the Clinton administration's request -- will vote against the motion to proceed to the Defend America Act.

The fact is that the President speaks of his support for national missile defense, but acts in opposition to it. Last year the President vetoed the Defense Authorization Bill specifically citing the provision making it U.S. policy to deploy a national missile defense system by 2003.

Many of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle also profess their support of missile defense but are quick to add that they cannot support this bill.

It is hard to understand their reasons. They cite technological questions, mention costs, but ignore the fact that this bill puts the very decision of what system is chosen in the hands of President Clinton's own Secretary of Defense.

That leads me to one conclusion: the Clinton administration and its allies seek to avoid debate on Defending America. This is unfortunate and irresponsible.

I believe that an open debate and discussion on this national security issue is vitally important because there are many misconceptions -- about the threat our nation faces, about the present state of our missile defense programs, about the cost of an effective national missile defense system.

U.S. Has No Defense Against Ballistic Missile Attack

The greatest misconception held by a majority of the American people is that the United States can defend itself against ballistic missile attack.

Most Americans think that if a ballistic missile is fired at the United States, we can shoot it down. The truth is, we cannot. We have no defense -- I repeat -- no defense against ballistic missiles.

As we enter the 21st century, there is no greater threat to our nation, than that posed by the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the means to deliver them. The list of countries acquiring chemical, biological and nuclear weapons, and ballistic missile technology numbers around 25 at present -- and is steadily growing.

President Clinton's former CIA Director, Jim Woolsey, testified at length to the Congress on the nature of the proliferation threat and was critical of recent intelligence estimates which were narrowly focused and based on questionable assumptions.

America Must Take Account of New Strategic Situation

You would not know from some of today's remarks by opponents of the Defend America Act that the Cold War is over. The Soviet Union no longer exists. Yet, the Clinton administration, some on the other side of the aisle -- and even some members of the press -- are acting as if we are still in the 1970s and 1980s. They

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speak of "star wars", space shields, mutual assured destruction. But, the world has changed. We must look to the future, not the past.

I would like to quote from one of the key Clinton administration arms control experts, Mr. Bob Bell. He is quoted in today's Washington Post defending changes being made to the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty, saying "...Were we going to take account of this change in the strategic situation over the last five years...?"

That is what we are talking about here -- taking account of the change in the strategic situation. This bill recognizes that the threat our country faces has changed and it seeks to respond to it in a measured and responsible fashion.

The Defend America Act does not require abrogation of the ABM Treaty. It urges the President to negotiate with the Russians on changes to the ABM treaty -- just as the administration has been doing with other arms control treaties only at the Russians' request. Which makes me wonder if the Russians asked for changes to the ABM treaty would the Clinton administration have a different position?

America Has Technological Capability to Mount Effective Defense

As for our ability to defend America -- there should be no doubt that we have the technological capability to effectively defend our citizens from the growing threat of ballistic missiles. What is needed is the will and leadership to deploy an effective national missile defense system by 2003.

A national missile defense system cannot be built overnight. The development and production of new tanks, new fighter planes takes years. And, when these new weapons systems, for example the stealth fighter, are finally deployed they are not obsolete.

Effective Missile Defense System Can Be Deployed Affordably

Finally, on the matter of cost. The CBO estimates are so wide-ranging that they are almost irrelevant as a guide to decision-makers. We need to look at our defense needs and affordability. And an effective national missile defense system can be deployed affordably. One can add any number of unnecessary requirements to a number of weapons system thereby making them unaffordable. This is no different than building a house. A family of four probably needs a three bedroom home -- not a 10 bedroom mansion. This does not mean that a 10 bedroom house cannot be built -- if one has the money.

End the Conspiracy of Silence on Ballistic Missile Threat

Let us get past the distortions and the hollow rhetoric and move toward a serious debate on defending America. I would like to quote from a great Western leader, former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher,

"With the collapse of the Soviet Union there was also a dispersal of weapons of mass destruction and of the technologies to produce them. This has gone much further than we envisaged; and it now constitutes quite simply the most dangerous threat of our times. Yet there is still a conspiracy of silence among western governments and analysts about it. "

Let us end the conspiracy of silence. The American people deserve better. The most basic responsibility our government has to its citizens is to protect them from harm. To ignore the changing world and cling to past thinking is inexcusable.

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