

Reagan makes SDI '86 campaign issue

by Kathleen Klenetsky

President Reagan gave a speech in Maryland Oct. 15 to boost the campaign of Republican Senate candidate Linda Chavez, in which for the first time, he put the Strategic Defense Initiative right in the middle of the 1986 election campaigns.

"Today," said Reagan, in his first campaign appearance since the Iceland summit, "I urge the voters of Maryland and the voters of this nation to ask each of their candidates this question: Where do you stand on defending America? Where do you stand on SDI?"

Reagan scored Chavez's opponent, liberal Democrat Barbara Mikulski, and her co-thinkers on Capitol Hill, who want to give up the SDI and the rest of American military defenses. Branding Mikulski a "wily liberal" and an "advocate of the failed policies of the past," Reagan said: "It would be a terrible tragedy for this country and for our children's future if those on Capitol Hill opposed to SDI are allowed to hand over to the Soviet Union free of charge what we refused to hand over across the negotiating table in Reykjavik.

"Forty-eight hours after we came home from Reykjavik some on Capitol Hill were already promising to take a meat ax and chop up America's SDI, which is exactly what Mr. Gorbachov is hoping Congress will do."

By going on the offensive, by aggressively making support for the SDI a key issue in the November elections, Reagan has done what Democratic presidential candidate Lyndon LaRouche and his wing of the Democratic Party, the core of pro-SDI political forces in the United States, urged him to do in 1986: He has turned the tables on the liberal Democrats, who had themselves been counting on using the SDI and the collapse of the summit as an election weapon against Reagan and his party.

If Reagan had done this earlier, the SDI would not be endangered today—and the failing U.S. economy would be already experiencing the benefits of the technological "boom" the SDI will bring to it.

Reagan's new resolve was signaled as soon as the summit broke up, as various representatives of the Moscow support group on the Hill crawled out to blast the President for his "intransigence" on the SDI.

Sen. Ted Kennedy (D-Mass.) lamented that a "grand and historic opportunity was there in Iceland, but it has been sacrificed—at least for the moment—on the uncertain altar of the SDI." Sen. Gary Hart (D-Colo.), who is retiring from the Senate to run full-time for the presidency, charged that Reagan had "given up what could have been an astounding

achievement in arms control to protect a system that is theoretical and enormously expensive. . . . History will show that was a bad bargain on his part."

Others, like Sen. Sam Nunn (D-Ga.) and Rep. Les Aspin (D-Wisc.), made thinly veiled threats that they would now seek to destroy the SDI through cuts in funding; Rep. Tony Coelho (D-Calif.), chairman of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, said there may now be a revolt among some House Democrats who will "question whether we should go along with the President now. . . . This shows the administration is not able to bring about world peace or turn around the economy."

Democrats' dilemma

But pursuing this strategy could sink the Democrats politically. Reagan's decision to make SDI a centerpiece of the campaigns is backed by post-summit polls showing that the American electorate overwhelmingly supports what Reagan did at Reykjavik, and shares the President's dream of building a defense that will render nuclear weapons "impotent and obsolete." The results are particularly telling, given how much outright lying the mass media has done to undermine support for the anti-missile system:

- Eighty percent of callers to an informal poll conducted by WTTG-TV in Washington, D.C., Oct. 14 said they supported President Reagan's handling of the Reykjavik summit. Of 7,421 calls received, 6,014 said they favored Reagan's handling, and 1,407 opposed.

- An NBC-*Wall Street Journal* poll conducted Oct. 14 showed that 71% of Americans fully back Reagan's handling of the Reykjavik summit. Fifty percent supports the SDI no matter what the Soviets do (e.g., break off arms talks); another 27% supports the SDI as a bargaining chip; while "only 15%"—as disgruntled NBC anchorman Tom Brokaw put it—totally oppose the program.

- In a national CBS-*New York Times* poll, 68% of those queried backed Reagan's stand at Iceland on the SDI, while only 20% said he "should have given up the SDI. . . in order to get Gorbachov to agree to a big reduction in Soviet and U.S. nuclear weapons." Moreover, 60% of those polled said they believe the SDI is likely to work, as opposed to 21% who said it wouldn't.

Reagan pollster Richard Wirthlin's opinion poll showed that 73% of Americans now approve of the way Reagan is handling his job, an increase of 9% since the summit. Reagan's approval rating jumped 6 points following his Oct. 13 report to the nation on Reykjavik, and 3 points more after administration officials began hitting the airwaves to explain what had occurred. Of those questioned, there was 3-1 agreement that "if the Soviets feel so strongly about the U.S.'s SDI, then they must feel it has a good chance, if developed, to shoot down ICBMs."

Apparently, unlike the majority of U.S. congressmen, most Americans don't want to depend on Moscow's good graces for their future security.