

Congressmen begin to consider beam weapons

by Susan Kokinda in Washington

As congressional sources privately admitted that "the Kennedy nuclear freeze is gutted," a different kind of "defense debate" has opened up in Congress, initiated by President Reagan's March 23 announcement of the change in U.S. strategic policy.

Two separate resolutions were introduced on the Senate floor the day after Reagan spoke, calling for support of the President in his initiative to render nuclear-armed ICBMs "impotent and obsolete."

Republican National Committee chairman Sen. Paul Laxalt (R-Nev.), a political ally of the President, introduced Senate Resolution 100, declaring that as "various technologies hold out real hope that the United States government could offer the American people substantial protection against ballistic missile and it is reasonably clear that the Soviet Union has provided itself with offensive space weapons . . . it is the sense of the Senate that the President expeditiously recommend to the Congress the budgetary steps necessary to protect the American people by building weapons for deployment in space, at the earliest possible date, with the capability of destroying ballistic missiles which might be launched against our country." The resolution, cosponsored by Sen. Malcolm Wallop (R-Wyo.), cites the Soviet space-based laser program as motivation for U.S. efforts in this area.

Later that day, Sen. William Armstrong (R-Colo.) introduced Senate Con. Res. 23, a more detailed resolution in support of the President's initiatives.

The Armstrong resolution:

●Supports "the President's call for a more humane and ethical strategic policy for the United States."

●Supports "the President's efforts to develop strategic defensive systems as a new policy of peace to reduce our present sole dependence on the threat of nuclear retaliation."

●Commends "the President for his courageous initiative to develop new arms-control policies and other measures, including those built on the deployment of strategic defense

systems, to eliminate the threat posed by nuclear weapons to all mankind."

●Supports "the President's historic call for a national technological and scientific effort to develop means of rendering nuclear weapons impotent and obsolete."

On the same day, moderate Democrats on the Senate Commerce, Transportation and Science Committee introduced legislation to create a National Space Commission to assess and rejuvenate the American effort in space.

A congressional source close to the leadership of the nuclear freeze movement complained that Reagan has "seized the initiative from us . . . the only way to get it back is to discredit him and Edward Teller." While claiming to be confident that the freeze resolution would still be voted up when it is reconsidered on the floor of the House April 19, the source confided, "Governor Harriman and other top Democratic leaders were very upset when we had to pull the freeze resolution off the floor. We bungled it badly and Reagan was able to regroup." He added, "We can't afford to lose the freeze vote. It would be a real disaster for us and make our fights against Reagan's star wars missile defense much harder."

Before the freeze vote, on April 13, the National Democratic Policy Committee plans to bring hundreds of Americans to Washington for a show of force in favor of a strategic defense and against the continuation of the MAD doctrine embodied in the anti-technology freeze resolution. Whether it passes the House or not, the Kennedy freeze is dead, commented one Democratic source, who suggested to an NDPC representative that the President's initiative "represents opportunities for a bipartisan program, doesn't it?"

Another source close to Democratic leadership remarked that "Democrats have to be the party of the future, we can't be the party of the past," and suggested important party figures might support the beam weapon program. The moderate Democrats now see the possibility of joining with the President to effect a technology-based industrial mobilization for beam weapons that would end the depression, as President Franklin Roosevelt ended the last depression with the defense mobilization that preceded World War II.

Should those Democrats "get a message" from their constituents that "We want a beam weapons anti-depression program, and we won't take no for an answer," Harriman underling Charles "Banker" Manatt's control of the Democratic National Committee wouldn't last a week, and the party quickly purge itself of similar KGB "assets."

Perhaps sensing their day is already over, the Harrimanites have been babbling venomously against the President. Ted van Dyk, of the Harrimanite political action committee Center for National Policy, described the President's March 23 speech as "a Hinckley finish—the insanity defense." Sen. Spark Matsunaga (D-Hawaii) and Sen. David Durenburger (R-Minn.) showed up in the Senate chamber after midnight as Armstrong was speaking on behalf of his resolution to complain that beam weapons were "destabilizing."