

Statement on Action by the House of Representatives on Production of the MX Missile

December 7, 1982

Today's vote by the House of Representatives was a grave mistake. Unless reversed in coming days, it will seriously set back our efforts to protect the Nation's security and could handcuff our negotiators at the arms table.

I had hoped that most of the Members in the House had awakened to the threat facing the United States. That hope was apparently unfounded. A majority chose to go sleepwalking into the future.

The facts on the Peacekeeper missile are clear and straightforward:

-- For 37 years, we have kept world peace because we have been adequately protected on land, sea, and air. We maintained a margin of safety.

-- But in recent years, a vital part of that defense -- our land-based missile system -- has become increasingly obsolete. The United States hasn't built a new land-based missile system in 15 years; the Soviets are now in their fifth generation of new missiles.

-- As a result, a window of vulnerability has opened for the United States, a window the Peacekeeper is designed to close.

-- Unless we act soon, the Soviets cannot only discount our land defenses, but they can also concentrate their new research on defeating us at sea and in the air.

-- And of great importance, we should know from experience that the Soviets will not negotiate with us when we disarm ourselves. Why should they negotiate seriously when we give up weapon systems voluntarily, asking nothing of them in return?

It would be tragically ironic if this of all days -- December 7th -- once again marked a time when America was unprepared to keep the peace.

Fortunately, there is still time to reverse this grievous error. Soon the issue will be taken up by the United States Senate. If it succeeds there, a conference of the House and Senate can be convened and the production program can be saved. Then we can engage in a longer debate on the best way to house the missile.

In the meantime, I plan to do everything I can to take this case to the country. Jefferson said the American people if given the facts would never make a mistake. I will present those facts and urge our citizens everywhere to join in trying to restore America's margin of safety.

SOURCE: <http://www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1982/120782e.htm>