

Editorial

Daily Nebraskan
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

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SDI is futile Laws of science say 'no'

Evidence continues to mount against President Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative, widely known as "Star Wars." Both the scientific and political community dispute the administration's claims about the plan's technical feasibility and costliness.

A recently reported poll of physicists demonstrates that most of these scientists don't think the plan can be technologically feasible anytime in the foreseeable future. This contradicts the optimistic forecast of an early 1990s development predicted by Lt. Gen. James A. Abrahamson.

A Senate study confirms the scientists' perspective. It also reports a number of other difficulties with the plan.

The Senate study points out that the difficulties in SDI development have greatly increased since the first feasibility studies were released several years ago.

First, most of the progress made in SDI technology hasn't been in the area of advancing the deployment date. Rather, the research to date has served only to prove that scientists don't know much more than they originally thought they didn't know. They know that the gulf between where we are and where we would need to be in order to deploy the system is much wider than originally suspected.

Second, the study points out that original assessments of the program assumed no Soviet measures to counter the SDI's strategic threat. That is, the first optimistic indications of SDI effectiveness assumed that the Soviet missile systems would remain like they were at that time.

The study states that this assumption is clearly wrong. The Soviets would not sit still while SDI deployment threatens to neutralize their strategic capability. Instead, the study reports that the Soviets could make their missiles 10 times more difficult to neutralize with the SDI system than the defense department originally assumed.

Billions upon billions of dollars fruitlessly sunk in a still-born SDI program can hardly be afforded by the nation.

There are those who argue that the United States cannot afford to merely sit by and let the Soviets develop a SDI-like system of their own. But the laws of science are not politically biased.

Technological feasibility is not altered when the scientist steps from the West to the East. If the Soviets want to waste billions of roubles chasing a ghost, let them.

Additionally, the only feasible use of any such SDI system eliminates the reason for its existence. The Washington Post recently reported one scientist working on the project as saying that the only effective means of countering all the problems with SDI would be to have "joint U.S.-Soviet battle stations." That is what Reagan proposed in his debate with challenger Walter Mondale during the last presidential campaign.

Yet if Reagan thinks that the United States and Soviets can jointly develop and administer such a powerful anti-nuclear system, a better idea seems to be to save all the money, sit down with similar seriousness and prevent the need for SDI through joint nuclear disarmament. Either way, it's time to give up SDI as a necessary or feasible means of averting the nuclear threat.

Welcome, coach NU basketball future is promising

Nebraska's new basketball coach Danny Nee has an impressive track record.

He turned an ailing Ohio University team into conference champions in just three years and received two consecutive NCAA tournament bids in his six years at Ohio.

Let's hope Nee can do the same for Nebraska. Nee replaced Moe Iba, who resigned March 14 after Nebraska's 67-59 loss to Western Kentucky in its first-ever NCAA tournament bid.

Nee is definitely qualified for the coaching job. He had a 107-67 record at Ohio. Nee was a member of Al McGuire's first recruiting class at Marquette University in 1964-65. A native of Brooklyn, N.Y., Nee was a high school teammate of Lew Alcindor, now Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, at Power Memorial High School.

Nee also was an assistant to Notre Dame basketball coach Richard "Digger" Phelps for four

years before he accepted the Ohio University coaching job.

Nee's teams are known for their fast-paced offense and pressure defense. The combination makes basketball exciting and could once again fill the Bob Devaney Sports Center with loyal Big Red fans.

Another of Nee's strong points is his recruiting ability. He already started recruiting, but he is at a great disadvantage because basketball national-letter-of-intent signing day is April 9.

Despite the time dilemma, Nee could be fairly successful because of his solid recruiting contacts in major urban areas, such as New York, Los Angeles, Chicago and Philadelphia.

UNL Athletic Director Bob Devaney, UNL Chancellor Martin Massengale and any others who helped select UNL's new basketball coach should be commended for their choice.

Welcome to Nebraska and best of luck, Danny Nee.



Wealthy elderly reap benefits Money should be granted for need instead of age

There are, in life, small moments of recognition that produce a click, a glottal stop of consciousness. Finally, once and for all, you know something is out of whack.

Maybe it happens when you read the statistics again and, at last, it sinks in. Today a child in America is six times more likely to be poor than an elderly person.

Maybe it happens when you notice a line on Form 1040. Everyone older than 65, no matter what income level, is entitled to a second personal exemption.

For me, it happened as I read a tale of the joys of aging written by Sheilah Graham. The Hollywood gossip columnist wrote about a house in Palm Beach and pleasure trips abroad. Almost incidentally, she added: "This is a small matter, but it gives me satisfaction to pay half-fare on buses and trains and only \$2 at the movies." Click.

It's not that I begrudge Ms. Graham her "satisfaction" nor do I know the bottom line of her bank account. But somehow I do not think she is the person we had in mind when we thought of bus subsidies and senior-citizen discounts, or when we established social programs and tax policy.

Something has gone out of whack. We have looked at the elderly too long as a single class. By and large, they are no longer the "ill-clad, ill-housed, ill-nourished" population that Franklin Delano Roosevelt described. The country has done a remarkable job of changing the portrait and so have the elderly themselves. Today, the rate of poverty among those older than 65 is lower

than among the rest of Americans.

We've made these changes at a cost that we find easier to calculate than to remedy. This year, the working population will pay \$200 billion in Social Security taxes. Those benefits have increased 46 percent in real terms since 1970, while the real wages of those who pay them have declined by 7 percent. More than half of the money from all the social programs go to the 11 percent of Americans who are elderly.



Ellen Goodman

Samuel Preston of the University of Pennsylvania explains: "The transfers from the working-age population to the elderly are also transfers away from children, since the working ages bear far more responsibility for child-rearing than do the elderly."

This isn't a time for elder-bashing nor do I have the stomach for generational warfare. We can't replace the stereotype of the impoverished old with a new stereotype of the entitled old. But it is important to update policies to match the new reality. As Preston says, "If the main purpose of social programs is to help people who are poor have more resources, it doesn't make sense to use age as an indicator of poverty."

There is already some pressure to right the imbalance within and between

generations using the tax structure. We now tax half the Social Security of elderly couples with incomes over \$32,000 and put that money back into the Social Security Trust Fund.

As for Medicare, some reformers recommend raising money from the 40 percent of elderly who pay income taxes and using it to lower Medicare premiums for low-income people. Other politicians, from Pat Moynihan to President Reagan, want to raise the personal tax exemption for all but the highest income brackets to \$2,000 as an aid to families with children.

Only 38 percent of the voters in the country live with children. It is an article of faith among politicians that the elderly will think of themselves first. But I am not so sure or so cynical. In that same article, Sheilah Graham wrote, "As an older person, I don't have to worry about the future. I am in the future." But then she talked of giving something to her grandson.

This is the other model that older Americans respect: the family. In the family, when it works right, we do not send our children to summer camp while our parents are without food. Nor do we send our parents to Florida while our children need clothes for school. We make adjustments; we balance the checkbook according to need. It is time to re-balance that checkbook now — not by a standard of age alone, but using the calculator called fairness.

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Goodman is a Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist for the Boston Globe.

Letters

Brief letters are preferred, and longer letters may be edited. Writer's address and phone number are needed for verification.

Separation of church and state preserves free society

I found James Rogers' column (Daily Nebraskan, March 19), to be most interesting. I would agree with him that religion constitutes an effective embodiment of a particular value system. Furthermore, it is an important aspect of the cultural cohesion and continuity of those who share it.

How Rogers gets from this point to challenging the wisdom of the separation of church and state is, however, beyond me. He in fact succeeds only in demonstrating its necessity.

While Rogers' vocabulary is a refreshing change from the semi-literate money-grubbing drivels of TV evangelists, his conceptual development does not extend far beyond theirs. He states that Christian societies are successful because God blesses his people, apparently at the expense of those he does not claim as "his."

Rogers, in fact, seems to have detailed information regarding the nature and opinions of the almighty. He maintains that only Christianity encompasses all truth and offers a rundown of that

truth in terms of the sacrifice of Jesus for our sins, his resurrection three days later and, I assume, the promise of immortality to anybody who buys the story.

I couldn't care less what kind of hocus-pocus Rogers cares to indulge in, but I find the above construction most amusing coming from a man who rejects humanism because it "fails to pass the test of intellectual credibility."

In any event, Rogers knows what God likes and, by sheer coincidence, God likes Rogers and those who share his theology. How many times have we heard this muddle-headed nonsense before? How many times must we see its manifestations before we learn the lesson? From the programs of extermination referred to in man's earliest writings to the grisly events on a farmstead near Rulo, history is replete with examples of what can happen when man pretends to know the mind of God. That very act of faith, as comforting as it might be, is fraught with danger. For if you know what God loves, you know

what God hates, and there is always the temptation (or is it a duty?) to be the earthly agent of your deity.

Rogers' agreement with the understatement that value systems based on religion warrant "scrutiny" to determine how they can be utilized while minimizing the risk of violence and oppression clearly illustrated by their history is of little comfort. If Rogers is like most theists, he has inspected his theology and determined that it would be a good way to run the world.

Contrary to what Rogers thinks, I do not believe that atheists advocate the clear separation of church and state because of any "cultural advantage" it entails. Rather, atheists (and, I might add, growing numbers of enlightened theists) support the separation of church and state because it avoids the tangible and frightening possibilities that history demonstrates to be attended upon the investment of a deity with the powers of the state.

Steve Haack
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