FROM: Phyllis Schlafly

68 FAIRMOUNT, ALTON, ILLINOIS 62002 / (618) 462-5415

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CIVIL DEFENSE NEEDED

All of a sudden, Americans are thinking the unthinkable. It's even on the cover of Time Magazine. Despite treaties, theories, SALT, freezes, arms-control negotiations, and hopes, nuclear war just might happen.

The question is, will our government do its job of taking any and all precautions which can save American lives if that unthinkable event does take place? Or, will our government be caught as flatfooted as the British government when the Argentinians moved into the Falkland Islands?

The Reagan Administration doesn't intend to fall into that box. Accepting its primary responsibility of saving American lives is the reason why President Reagan has proposed a $4.2 billion civil defense program. The purpose of civil defense is to save millions of American lives.

No duty of government could be more important. No goal could be more humanitarian, or compassionate, or concerned about human welfare.

We should neither overestimate nor underestimate the protection that civil defense can provide. Civil defense cannot prevent war. It cannot totally protect all Americans. But it can greatly lessen the number of lives that would be lost in a nuclear war. If we value human life, that is a worthy enough goal to justify whatever expenditures are required.

Medians and barriers down the middle of interstates and expressways certainly cannot prevent all automobile accidents or even all auto fatalities, but our government builds them at tremendous expense because they save some lives. That's only one of dozens of examples in our daily life where the American conscience accepts the responsibility to pay a high cost in order to save some lives that might otherwise be lost.

It is impossible any longer to reasonably deny the possibility of nuclear war. Since the first duty of government is to protect its citizens, our government has the obligation to embark on an immediate program to ensure the survival of as many American

lives as possible.

Civil defense is a goal on which hawks and doves can unite because it is not aggressive; it does not seek territory or control or riches; it has no ideology except a humanitarian desire to safeguard the lives of innocent people.

Civil defense cannot save those in the immediate target area of a nuclear attack. But nobody knows how many Americans might be in the immediate target area of a possible nuclear attack. Soviet military doctrine calls for an attack on military targets first, most of which are in sparsely populated parts of the United States. If we get that kind of attack, civil defense would save millions of people living in cities.

Civil defense would be highly effective in protecting Americans against fallout in a nuclear war between other countries, such as between the U.S.S.R. and China, since the prevailing winds are from West to East. Civil defense would be very effective in protecting us against a small nuclear attack by some small terrorist country.

One of the stale arguments sometimes made against civil defense is that it is "provocative." That is ridiculous because the Soviets already have their own extensive civil defense program. Our civil defense cannot possibly be provocative.

To the clergy who today are agitating for peace, let us ask the question: Is it not your duty to demand that the government provide a passive, non-aggressive protection against the possibility that our "peace" goals will be less than successful?

The Vatican is spending $1.6 million to build a bomb shelter for the Vatican art treasures. Are not human lives just as worthy of protection as paintings and statues?

Civil defense has nothing to do with what kind of a nuclear freeze we have, or don't have. Civil defense has nothing to do with how many missiles or submarines or bombers the United States has, or doesn't have. Civil defense has nothing to do with the "overkill" argument -- how many Russians we can kill how many times over.

Civil defense only has to do with saving American lives. How could anybody be against that? Just because we cannot save ALL Americans, or we can't save those in the big cities such as New York, that is no argument for refusing to save those we can save.

The cost? Yes, it will be costly. If we can't save everybody at once, we can start in one state and then keep going. After all, the lives we save may be our own.