BY PHYLLIS SCHLAFLY FOR U.S.A. TODAY RELEASE: MARCH 2, 1986

PRESIDENT REAGAN'S DEFENSE SPEECH

Yes, indeed, it is our President's "highest duty," as Ronald Reagan said, "to preserve peace and defend these United States." Nothing the Federal Government does is more crucial. Everything else combined which the Federal Government does is not as important as defending our nation against foreign enemies.

All other problems which our nation faces can be addressed at least in part by other institutions: state and local governments, churches, schools, families, or other social or economic organizations. Only the Federal Government, with the President and Congress working together, can defend us against the Soviet missile force.

Most mistakes that people make are the result of not considering all the alternatives. Let's consider the alternative ways of responding to the President's speech.

If we spend on national defense what President Reagan asks and he turns out to have overstated our needs, it will cost us some money, maybe even a lot of money. But if we don't spend what President Reagan asks and he turns out to be right, it will cost us our lives, our families, our freedoms, our independence, our national survival. That's not worth the risk.

Of course we have a big Pentagon establishment. We have a big, wealthy country to defend. Everyone knows that, if you have a big house your fire insurance costs more than if you have a small house. You pay your premiums and hope you'll never collect.

Today we are spending a third less of our Gross National Product on defense than we spent under the John F. Kennedy Administration. However, the most relevant comparison is between our current forces and those of our potential enemies.

The awesome truth is that the Soviets have a three-to-one hard-target kill advantage over us, and still are spending much, much more than we are. The Soviets have spent $500 billion more than we have over the past 15 years.

As President Reagan said, "Each generation has to live with the challenges history delivers. And we can't cope with these challenges by evasion."

The fact is that spending more on military weapons will end up by costing us less. The more we show our strength ahead of time, the less chance that anyone will pick a fight with us. Furthermore, when we ask young men to risk their lives for our country, we owe them the best hardware and technological support that money can buy.

President Reagan's defense budget should be supported in full as the most cost-effective way of preserving our national independence. The lives we save might be our own.