

# Chronological: Democrats Response to Reagan's Defense Address

Senator Daniel K. Inouye Papers  
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SENATOR DANIEL K. INOUE

DEMOCRATIC RESPONSE TO PRESIDENT REAGAN'S DEFENSE ADDRESS

(March 23, 1983)

My fellow Americans, my name is Dan Inouye and I am a United States Senator from Hawaii. In the Senate, I serve on the Commerce, Intelligence, and Appropriations Committees. In fact, I am speaking to you this evening from the Appropriations Committee room in the United States Capitol Building. In this room, the Appropriations Committee makes decisions on defense spending -- on spending for education or health -- on spending for all programs of the federal government.

My fellow Democrats in the Congress have asked me to speak to you this evening -- to present our response to the President's speech on defense spending, which he gave last night.

We are deeply troubled. Last night, the President attempted to instill fear in the hearts of the American people, to raise the specter of a Soviet armed nuclear attack, and to divert our attention from the dismal failure of his economic policies.

The President spoke of Soviet advances in the development and deployment of missiles armed with nuclear warheads. He left the impression that the United States had stood still while the Soviets accelerated and vastly expanded their nuclear arsenal. Indeed, he left the impression that the United States is at the mercy of the Soviet Union.

Most respectfully, Mr. President, you know that is not true. Our scientists, our engineers, our generals, are not dunces. You could have -- but chose not to mention the superiority of the submarine based missiles we have developed to counter the Soviets. You could have -- but chose not to mention our superior, indeed our singular -- development of cruise missiles which can penetrate all known Soviet defenses.

In your urgency to defend your defense budget, with its huge increases, against the more moderate proposals which have received bipartisan support in the Congress, we believe that you have failed to present an honest picture -- here it is -- Soviet land based

intercontinental missiles outnumber those of the United States. But the warheads on these missiles are more than offset by our warhead advantage in sea-based submarine missiles, and our bombers and cruise missiles. This graph -- on your right -- shows the total of warheads the Soviets have (7,339) and the total we have (9,268).

The President knows these figures, just as he knew a week ago, a year ago -- even two years ago -- that Cuba has MIG 21 and MIG 23 aircraft. The question is why did the President choose this time to declassify aerial photographs of these planes in Cuba. Why did he suggest American inferiority? I believe he did so because he is afraid that his excessive defense budget will be trimmed by the Congress and because he wants to take our attention off of the economic disasters brought on by his policies.

As a member of the Intelligence Committee, I deplore the selective declassification of information for political effect. It may be that the President, to bolster his views, has compromised sources of highly sensitive intelligence information.

Our national strength does not depend solely on the number of missiles we have. Of greater significance, is the character and qualifications of our people. We must also weigh in the balance, the strength of our economy. If we accept a defense budget which puts a crushing burden on our economy, which drives us closer to the precipice of economic collapse -- if we accept a defense budget which dramatically increases the deficit and, in turn, prolongs unemployment, high interest rates, and low productivity -- are we a stronger nation? I think not. A gathering majority of the Senate and the House of Representatives feels the same and is preparing to reduce the extraordinary defense expenditures proposed by the President.

President Reagan says he wants a stronger America. So do we Democrats. We differ on how to achieve the goal. In the last three years defense expenditures have soared. But private investment in factories and machinery has fallen and so has the number of Americans at work. America is getting weaker on the Reagan program.

We are concerned with our national defense. We think it must be strengthened. But, we also believe that our strength is enhanced by programs which strengthen the education and the health of our

people. We are concerned that 70 million Americans have difficulty reading and writing well enough to apply for a job.

We were deeply shocked by a recent Department of Education report that indicated that 56% of adult Hispanic Americans were functionally illiterate, that 47% of adult Black Americans were functionally illiterate, and 17% of "White Americans" are functionally illiterate. How can these Americans truly enjoy the fruits of our democracy, if they have difficulty in filling out a job application form.

The President closed his speech last night with a "Star Wars scenario." He spoke of laser technology and other exotic techniques which would be used to destroy incoming missiles. We Democrats would like to suggest that if the United States is to develop, deploy, and man these "Buck Rogers" devices and equipment, we will need an army that is highly trained and knowledgeable in mathematics, sciences, electronics, and computer technology. But what is the picture today? Before the Reagan recession, when unemployment was not too bad, 20% of those who volunteered and were accepted into our volunteer army were functionally illiterate. Now, it is true that because of the recession, many high school graduates are seeking employment in our army and the number of functional illiterates has been reduced. But the technology proposed by the President as the answer to our defense requirements would require that more college graduates volunteer to serve in our armed forces. Do you know of any college graduates who have volunteered to serve in the army? Prior to the recession, more than 30% of U.S. Navy war ships were not ready for combat because there were insufficient trained personnel to make them seaworthy and combat-ready. Don't you believe it is tragic that we have to rely on recession and high unemployment to attract better qualified personnel into our armed services?

Last night, President Reagan spoke of our children in the 21st century -- we are concerned about them as well, but we are also concerned about the children of today. Since he has been in office, the President has cut child nutrition programs by 33% -- he has cut programs which educate our people by 30%. I would submit that this does not make our nation strong.

Mr. President, let us not look for peace in yet another generation of destructive weapons. Let us begin now, with this generation of Americans, to destroy weapons. In the long sweep of history, the fundamental lesson is that civilizations do not rise or fall on strength of arms alone.

Democrats have a desire for peace. We recognize that our national defense must be strengthened. We ask only that the needs of our people be equally attended to.

We ask that our leaders bring us together, not huddling together in fear, but in hope for the future. We ask that our leaders attend to the needs of the least fortunate among us. Our strength is that we are "one nation under God, united." Each of us on the foundations of his own joys and suffering builds for all -- that is our strength.

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Embargoed  
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March 24, 1983

Contact: 224-2939

Congressional Democrats chose Senator Daniel K. Inouye, member of the Senate Democratic Leadership and of the Senate Intelligence and Appropriations Committees, to give their response today to President Reagan's Wednesday night defense speech.

Points made by Senator Inouye included:

-The impression given by the President that this country is at the mercy of the Soviets is not correct. The President used information selectively--ignoring areas of U.S. superiority.

-The President's "selective declassification of information for political effect" has compromised sources of highly sensitive intelligence information.

-A strong defense depends on more than arms. It also requires a strong economy--and well-educated, healthy people. Education is especially needed if the U.S. is to develop, deploy and man these "Buck Rogers devices" the President outlined for our future defense. But President Reagan is cutting education budgets and health appropriations.

Senator Daniel K. Inouye, enlisted in the all-Nisei 442nd Regimental Combat team at the age of 18. He served with this unit--the most decorated for its size in the U.S. Army--for four years. Senator Inouye had his right arm shattered while advancing alone against a machine gun nest which had pinned his men down. He spent 20 months in Army hospitals after losing his right arm. Enlisting as a private, Senator Inouye was discharged as a captain and had been awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, Bronze Star and Purple Heart with cluster and 12 other medals and citations.

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(Full text attached)