

Mr. Speaker, this month will mark the 25th anniversary since President Ronald Reagan gave that landmark speech at the zenith of the Cold War proposing what became known as the Strategic Defense Initiative to protect the United States of America and her allies and her vital interests from ballistic nuclear missile attack.

In that speech he unveiled a vision for the research, development, and ultimate deployment of a defensive non-nuclear-layered missile defense system that would give us the means to intercept and destroy incoming strategic nuclear missiles and render the threat of a nuclear attack from the Soviet Union impotent and obsolete. President Ronald Reagan's speech marked the end of a chapter in American history when the policies of appeasement and accommodation formed the basis of our foreign policy and the concept of mutually assured destruction was the only viable solution to the Soviet threat.

The apathy that caused democracies to neglect their defense in the 1930s had resulted in the tragedy of World War II. President Reagan reminded the world that it must not allow a similar apathy or neglect to cause that dismal chapter in history to repeat itself.

Speaking with that gentle but confident persuasiveness that would set him apart as the Great Communicator, Ronald Reagan rejected the specter of mutual retaliation and stood alone among Washington bureaucracy in the belief that our security is based on the ability to meet all threats and that peace must be preserved through strength. He knew that developing this revolutionary capability of ballistic missile defense would not be easy or a short-lived task. He said, "It will take years, perhaps decades of efforts on many fronts. There will be failures and setbacks, just as there will be successes and breakthroughs; and as we proceed, we must remain constant in preserving the nuclear deterrent and maintaining a solid capability for flexible response."

It seems that every revolutionary idea or stride toward greater human freedom is marked first by resistance and ridicule. President Reagan's daring SDI proposition was no exception. Indeed, American intelligentsia berated the idea that America should abandon its complacency and embrace a policy towards Communism as clear and simple and unapologetic as what Ronald Reagan stated in four words: "We win, they lose."

But hundreds of millions of people now live in freedom because of his clarity and his courage. Less than 9 years after Ronald Reagan gave his Evil Empire and Strategic Defense Initiative speeches, marking the beginning of what would become the United States' ballistic missile defense program, the entire world stood in stunned wonder and witnessed the dissolution of the once unshakable Soviet Union.

Today, under the vigilant and dedicated leadership of the Missile Defense Agency and the United States Armed Forces, ballistic missile defense technology has gone beyond development and testing. It is now operationally deployed by the United States and our allies in different parts of the world.

Only weeks ago, on February 21, 2008, President Ronald Reagan's vision, once labeled Star Wars by his deriding critics, was vindicated before the world when a Standard

Missile-3 rocket fired from the USS Lake Erie intercepted a disabled satellite tumbling from space toward Earth at over 17,000 miles per hour.

The pivotal significance of Ronald Reagan's almost prophetic vision no longer can be tested. More than ever it is vital for this Congress to continue to advance his vision of a layered ballistic missile defense system capable of defending land, air, sea, and space against rapidly evolving missile threats in a now-multipolar world.

President Reagan knew that if America was to remain a shining city upon a hill, it must remain secure. If it was to remain secure, it must remain strong. He also knew that the costs for maintaining that strength would be great.

But in his SDI speech of 25 years ago, President Reagan himself asked the most important and salient question about America's national security. He said: ``Isn't it worth every investment necessary to free the world from the threat of nuclear war?"

His question is as relevant today as it was then. May we of this generation honor the legacy of President Ronald Reagan, whose courage and commitment to protect the peace and national security of America not only hastened the demise of the Soviet Empire but transformed our strategic defense policy and gave us the means to ensure that America remains the beacon of hope, strength, and human freedom in the world for generations to come.