letters

NASA Administrator Fletcher and former Shuttle Program Manager Abrahamson.

References

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3. *Report of the President's Commission on Strategic Forces,* April 1983, p. 9.
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APS and SDI

Let us define SDI-1 as a population defense of such incredible efficiency and reliability that it would truly make nuclear weapons obsolete and SDI-2 as a ballistic-missile-defense system similar in purpose to the ABM systems of Presidents Johnson and Nixon (and in violation of the treaty Nixon finally agreed to).

SDI-1 is what President Reagan continues to describe to the public and to the Soviet leaders as SDI. But any competent physicist knows SDI-1 is impossible as long as the Soviet Union stays in the arms race. To call a spade a spade, it is a scientific hoax. I believe The American Physical Society has the urgent duty to warn the public and the President of what is perhaps the greatest scientific hoax in the history of our country. Remaining silent gives the impression that it is not a hoax. Even worse, forming an APS study committee without first warning the public is a signal to the public that APS thinks that SDI may well make nuclear weapons obsolete.

Because it is possible that the President has not received clear and competent scientific advice, it is important for him to see that the organization that represents American physicists is so strongly opposed to SDI-1. The American public, which depends on the advice and leadership of their President, certainly has not received competent advice. In fact, the latest public-opinion polls show the public is in favor of proceeding with SDI. The hoax is of such enormous magnitude that the public is now in the process of being cheated out of over 10^{12} dollars. Even more important than this loss of money and resources is the loss to our national security and the loss of new possibilities of arms reduction. I feel it is mandatory that the public receive scientific advice it can trust—via an APS public warning of the hoax that is now in progress.

I am using this letter to request the APS Council and officers to issue a public statement along the above lines before the results of its narrow and limited SDI studies are known. The following is a suggested wording of a proposed public statement that I have submitted to The American Physical Society Council for action at its next meeting:

> The Council of the APS feels it has the responsibility to warn the public and officials of our government that no amount of effort and cost could provide a nuclear weapon defense of population so efficient and reliable that it would make nuclear weapons obsolete; at least not as long as the Soviet Union stays in the arms race. Furthermore, anyone who claims the possibility of such an invincible shield against all forms of delivery, whether he knows it or not, is engaging in a scientific hoax which could ultimately lose the US taxpayer over a trillion dollars.

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WILLIAM W. HAVENS JR REPLIES: At the APS Council meeting, 26 January 1986, council member Michael Fisher introduced a motion prepared by Jay Orear. Following lengthy discussion, Thomas H. Moss, chairman of POPA, proposed the substitute motion "that the APS President appoint a special committee to examine the desirability of an APS Council statement on SDI and if a statement is desirable draft a proposed statement." The committee is to report its recommendations to the council for consideration at the next council meeting, on 27 April 1986. The substitute motion was approved by the council and all of us will have to wait until 27 April to find out what the APS Council will decide on this important matter.

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Star Wars petition

In his article on the nationwide campus anti-SDI petition drive (November, page 95) William Sweet quoted Lisbeth Gronlund and John Kogut as saying that few physicists would be eager to publicly defend SDI, or "Star Wars." While this may well be true at Cornell and Illinois, those of us who organized