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House Boosts Antimissile Funds as Democrats

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The House voted yesterday to boost 1996 spending on antimissile systems by about 25 percent over the administration's defense plan and firmly rejected a Democratic bid to affirm adherence to the U.S.-Soviet Antiballistic Missile (ABM) treaty.

In floor debate on the 1996 House defense authorization bill, Republicans asserted that their plan to accelerate development of antimissile systems does not violate the 23-year-old ABM accord. But their oral assurances were belied, Democrats said, by the GOP's evident determination to field a national missile defense system and some shorter-range systems that likely would exceed ABM constraints.

Democrats warned that the Republicans' ambiguity about complying with the ABM treaty

ty could alarm the Russians and jeopardize Moscow's approval of the second Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START). The Russian parliament is due to take up ratification later this year of START II, which provides for elimination of 5,000 of Moscow's arsenal of 8,500 long-range nuclear warheads.

Rep. John M. Spratt Jr. (D-S.C.) offered an amendment to the defense bill stipulating that the antimissile systems being funded would not violate the ABM treaty. The House rejected the proposal in a largely party-line vote, 242 to 185.

Another amendment, put forward by Reps. Ronald V. Dellums (D-Calif.) and Peter A. DeFazio (D-Ore.), would have redirected much of the increased funds for antimissile programs, applying the money instead to housing allowances for soldiers that would reduce the need of as many as 15,000 military families for food stamps. That measure also failed, 250 to 178.

The Democratic attempt to revise the House bill triggered a vigorous debate on the floor that ranged for nearly two hours over the extent of the missile threat to the United States and the nation's competing defense needs.

Republicans contended that stepped-up efforts by such adversarial states as Iraq, Iran, Libya, Syria and North Korea to obtain weapons of mass destruction required urgent countermeasures by the United States. Democrats cited intelligence estimates that say no countries beyond the world's current few major nuclear powers are likely to obtain missiles capable of reaching the United States for at least 10 years. They argued that the administration already has a well-conceived program for developing and deploying a variety of antimissile systems, with a total \$2.9 billion budgeted for them in fiscal 1996.

Republicans tried to avoid a direct confron-

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Worry About Impact on ABM Treaty

tation over the ABM treaty, preferring to focus on their initiative to expand development of shorter-range antimissile systems that would protect military personnel on the ground and at sea, and longer-range systems that would shield U.S. territory.

"This is not a bill about the ABM treaty," Rep. Curt Weldon (R-Pa.) said. "This is a bill about how we best defend the American people."

Several times during the debate, Weldon held up a letter sent to him yesterday from Army Lt. Gen. Malcolm O'Neill, head of the Pentagon's Ballistic Missile Defense Organization, saying the provisions of the House bill would not violate the ABM treaty.

But a number of Republican speakers clearly bridled at continued adherence to the 1972 bilateral accord, saying it left Americans unable to defend themselves against missile at-

tack and suggesting it no longer may be relevant in a world of proliferating missile threats.

Democrats seized on such expressions of dissatisfaction with the treaty to argue that the Republicans are intent eventually on abrogating the accord.

The House bill, scheduled for a final vote today, would authorize nearly \$3.8 billion for antimissile efforts, an increase of \$763 million over the administration's plan. The additional funds are intended to speed development not only of a system to defend U.S. territory but also the Navy's ship-launched Upper Tier and Lower Tier systems, the Army's ground-based Theater High Altitude Area Defense project and the Air Force's missile-detection satellites formerly called Brilliant Eyes.

The bill also would require the administration to adopt a liberal interpretation of the ABM treaty that would exempt the military's promising theater defense systems.