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Press Release - Muskie Says More ABM 'Chips' Jeopardize Arms Talks

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MUSKIE SAYS MORE ABM 'CHIPS' JEOPARDIZE ARMS TALKS

In a speech on the Senate floor today, Senator Edmund S. Muskie (D-Maine) warned that "piling more ABM chips on the bargaining table in Vienna" will make a meaningful strategic arms limitation agreement all the less likely.

"The chips on both sides are already piled high enough," Senator Muskie added in his prepared remarks. He emphasized that "the chips have been piled even higher by both sides in recent months -- first, by our initial ABM construction and our MIRV deployment -- and second, by Soviet resumption of SS-9 construction and commencement of SS-11 multiple warhead testing."

Expanded deployment of the Safeguard ABM, Senator Muskie stated, may well induce the Soviets "to counter our new chip with another chip of their own. We would risk losing the opportunity for a comprehensive agreement at SALT which could significantly curtail the arms competition. And all that might be left would be an agreement with no qualitative restrictions or meaningful reductions."

The Senator examined the standards which the Administration set forth last year to measure the need for future ABM deployment -- (a) Technical reliability of the Safeguard ABM system, (b) the Soviet and Chinese nuclear threats, and (c) the progress at the SALT talks.

"All three criteria," Senator Muskie concluded, "now argue against moving ahead with the Safeguard ABM."

At most, Mr. Muskie proposed, the Congress should authorize continued work only at the two ABM sites approved last year. This alternative would "preserve fully the 'bargaining chip' which the Administration claims it needs in Vienna... But it adds no more chips to our side of the table... and it recognizes that the way to slow down the arms race is not first to speed it up."

He called on the Administration "to let the Congress and the public know the progress and the prospects in Vienna."

And in response to the Administration's argument that an expanded ABM is needed in order to "negotiate from strength," Senator Muskie said, "We are already strong enough to negotiate. The question now is whether we are wise enough to negotiate."
