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## Interview: Governor Dixy Lee Ray

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# Anti-Strategic Defense Initiative arguments 'just plain foolish'



*Dr. Dixy Lee Ray, former member of the Atomic Energy Commission and former governor of Washington state, was interviewed by EIR's Nicholas F. Benton after she participated with other eminent scientists in a Washington, D.C. conference that hammered out a communiqué in strong support of the Strategic Defense Initiative Nov. 9-11. The group also included: Alvin Weinberg, Fermi Award recipient, former director of Oak Ridge National Laboratory; Eugene Wigner, Nobel Prize in physics, Manhattan Project; Behram N. Kursunoglu, Florida-based theoretical physicist; Carlo Salvetti, ex-deputy chairman, Italian Atomic Energy Commission; Jean-Pierre Gomané, vice-president, Centre des Hautes Etudes, Paris; Henry King Stanford, president emeritus, University of Miami; R.V. Jones, Department of Physics, University of Aberdeen.*

**EIR:** Can you give us some idea of the contents of the statement signed by the group of eminent scientists that were gathered for this conference this weekend?

**Dr. Ray:** We met for two days here in Washington in a seminar on the Strategic Defense Initiative. We all had occasion to voice our opinions on what has been accomplished so far, and what the goals and objectives of this particular program are. We listened to a number of people who are working directly in the program, and we also heard from Lt. Gen. James Abrahamson, who is directing the research program for the SDI. Our group was made up primarily of scientists working in similar fields: physicists, mathematicians, and engineers. And it included a couple of people not directly involved, like myself, whose experience has been rather more on the fringe of this kind of research—familiar with it but not doing it directly. Also included in the group were representatives of France, from Italy, and from Great Britain. The group was well equipped to speak in a critical way about whether a defensive system which would operate to try to intercept and shoot down incoming missiles could, in fact, operate.

We know are fully aware, that there has been a great deal of criticism of this system. In fact, many scientists, many with good credentials, have said it simply will not work. We believe that the system *can* work, that what has been done in

the last year and a half since the President first announced the initiative has already shown that this is a feasible system, at least for some of the laser-based components. What has been accomplished so far has really been quite remarkable. The whole SDI is really a vigorous program of research. It is meant to be research and development to test the feasibility of detonating ICBMs or other missiles and warheads before they can reach their target. I have to tell you, sir, that it is beyond my belief that there are people who could object to defending their country in a way in which an already-launched missile, on the journey to causing mass destruction, could be destroyed in outer space where it won't do any harm.

**EIR:** You do have those who assert that the technologies involved in the SDI will not work. You made a comment on that at the press conference earlier today.

**Dr. Ray:** Saying something won't work is the easiest possible cop-out. When Thomas Edison proposed that you could electrify cities, the Royal Society in London, which probably encompassed the best scientific minds in Great Britain at that time, met and, in a formal resolution, took a position against that, saying that to electrify cities was against scientific principle, and it could not possibly work.

The same thing has been said about splitting the atom, or achieving any kind of control of a nuclear reaction. There were plenty of physicists, plenty of engineers and mathematicians, in the early decades of this century who said that these things couldn't possibly work. When the Manhattan Project, itself, was begun, there was so much that was unknown. It was an open question whether actually a chain reaction could be started and controlled and put to a useful purpose. I'd love to have an hour or two just to detail the many useful things that have come from understanding how to control the energy of an atom.

There was Lee DeForest, a very eminent physicist, who in 1926 said that television, while it was a theoretical possibility, had no chance of ever being developed economically and for wide use. If we go farther back in history, the director of the Patent Office of the United States in the late 1800s said there was no point in having a Patent Office because everything had been invented that could be invented. And when

Robert Fulton appealed to Napoleon Bonaparte to develop steamships for the French navy, Napoleon said to him something along this line, "Excuse me, sir, are you trying to tell me that you can drive a ship against the wind and the currents by building a bonfire under her decks? I beg you, do not make me listen to such nonsense!"

**EIR:** A number of speakers at the press conference made repeated references to the Manhattan Project in which we gained control of the atom for the first time. It was said that the necessity that the Manhattan Project represented can be equated with the present situation, and that the Soviets are developing an equivalent to the SDI. What do you have to say on that?

**Dr. Ray:** With respect to the Soviets, why are they so violently opposed to our having a defensive system, when we know—and they know that we know—that they've been working on their own defensive system to defend the U.S.S.R. through SDI for more than 10 years? We know—and they know that we know—they've already tested out a number of anti-satellite weapons, and are working hard on laser-directed beams and similar things, just as we are. It seems to suggest that they want to be able to defend their country, but do not want us to be able to defend ours.

**EIR:** What do you say to those who argue that if the SDI is not able to shoot down virtually every single incoming missile, then it is useless, and only destabilizing?

**Dr. Ray:** That is just plain foolish. There is nothing that can ever be guaranteed to be 100% perfect in every way. You can't have 100% effective offensive weapons either, because you can't guarantee that every single one is going to hit the target. We have no such thing as perfect systems. With respect to defense, your shield—and that's what this really is—is to be able to prevent these things from coming in, and it will certainly prevent some of them. The important thing is, that your adversary will not know how many you can shoot down before they arrive at their target. So that introduces a kind of uncertainty which he has to take into account, and wonder how many more missiles he must set up in order to be sure some of his will get through. The idea that it is OK to have no means of defending ourselves, but not OK to defend ourselves against most missiles, is impossible to understand. It is to be expected that if there is the beginning of a nuclear exchange, some will probably get through. We hope that doesn't happen. . . . But, that would not be the end of the world, because we've already detonated two atomic bombs, and we know that didn't end the world. The idea is to make a situation where your opponent must stop and calculate how difficult it is going to be to overcome your defenses, rather than having your opponent know that you have no defenses, and having his decisions based only on a calculation as to whether he can sufficiently overcome your

offensive weapons so that you can't retaliate. That is what is called the MAD doctrine—the Mutually Assured Destruction doctrine—which is the stance we've been in for quite a long time. I believe that assuring ourselves of the best possible defense, and therefore putting your adversary in the very difficult situation of trying to calculate how good your defense is, is far to be preferred.

**EIR:** As a former governor of Washington state, and a Democrat when you were governor, you represent an element within the party which is supportive of the SDI. Do you have anything to say about whether the Democratic Party ought to stop following the pathway of those who categorically oppose such programs as the SDI and the development of the peaceful uses of nuclear energy?

**Dr. Ray:** First, I must correct what is a reasonable assumption on your part. I ran on the Democratic ticket. That doesn't mean I'm a Democrat. I ran on that ticket because I had to. You have to have some kind of identification in order to be a candidate for the office that I was seeking. But the Democratic Party never really accepted me, and I do not agree with many of the tenets of the Democratic Party. I believe that, in the years since I ran, it has become even farther to the left, and positions that the party has taken on such things as nuclear energy and defense, and so on, I simply can't accept. You see, our state is kind of a maverick. You don't really have to be a party member to be elected to office. So far as voting is concerned, we have open ballots on all elections, so one can vote one way or the other. I've never attended a party meeting and I never intend to. My own personal opinion is that political parties in this country are anachronisms, and all they do is come out of the woodwork every four years and provide you with candidates to vote for. I think that that could be done in better ways.

**EIR:** You signed a statement by the Schiller Institute in support of a new formation in West Germany called the Patriots for Germany, which has taken a position above all in strong support for the Western Alliance and the SDI. How do you see the role of the SDI in strengthening the alliance?

**Dr. Ray:** I think that our white paper that we issued today at this conference was very much strengthened by having members here representing interests from France, Italy, and Great Britain, because the strength of the SDI can only be enhanced by having it developed in cooperation with our allies, and having this roof of protection . . . apply as well to the intermediate-range missiles as to the ICBMs. That, of course, is the interest of our allies in Europe. It is as important for the defense of Europe as for the defense of the U.S. I believe . . . that the Western Alliance is extraordinarily important, and it is critical to maintain its strength today more than ever, because the dangers are far greater, as are the efforts to break it apart.