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*Nuclear Disarmament • Environmental Protection • Social Justice • Economic Sustainability*

For Immediate Release

June 15, 2004

## **Senate Gives Go-Ahead for Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator (RNEP)**

### **Prohibition on use of funds for new nuclear weapons under the “Advanced Concepts Initiative” also rejected**

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The Senate today rejected an amendment brought by senators Kennedy and Feinstein to the 2005 National Defense Authorization Act that would have prohibited the use of funds for the development of the Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator (RNEP), a new nuclear weapon meant to burrow into the earth before detonation. Roll call votes, text of the full bill, and the Kennedy-Feinstein amendment can be found online at <http://www.senate.gov>

The amendment was voted down 55 to 42 on mostly party lines. New Mexico's senators parted ways on the issue with Dominici voting against the amendment and Bingaman for it. Only one Republican voted to prohibit the RNEP's funding, Senator Lincoln Chafee of Rhode Island. Five Democrats voted against the prohibition.

Massachusetts senator and presumptive Democratic Presidential candidate John Kerry did not cast a vote, likely because of his campaign schedule. Recent polls have shown, however, that nuclear weapons are unpopular with the American public, potentially making them an important campaign issue.

A University of Maryland poll (“Americans on WMD Proliferation,” April 15, 2004) shows that 87% of Americans think the United States should participate in a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty which would ban test nuclear weapons explosions. Approximately 57% of Americans believe the U.S. should commit itself to never use nuclear weapons against a non-nuclear state; something for which the RNEP and the “mini-nukes” to be designed under the Advanced Concepts Initiative are specifically thought useful. Finally, the same poll shows that 65% of Americans do not think that new types of nuclear weapons are necessary. All these views and others found in the poll are strikingly at odds with current U.S. nuclear weapons policy. The poll can be found online at <http://www.pipa.org/>.

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