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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 committee 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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