

Stop Funding for New Nuclear Weapons

November 15, 2004: As soon as Wednesday, November 17, the full Senate Appropriations Committee may vote on whether to fund new nuclear weapons for fiscal year 2005.

The committee is expected next week to take up an "omnibus" appropriations bill. An omnibus appropriations bill takes the place of the unfinished appropriations bills and is expected to include funding for the nuclear weapons program.

The Bush Administration has asked Congress for \$27.6 million to continue a study on the Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator (RNEP), or nuclear "bunker buster," and \$9 million for the Advanced Concepts Initiative for new nuclear weapons.

Sen. Dianne Feinstein (CA) intends to offer an amendment in committee to delete the funds for new nuclear weapons. The amendment is unlikely to pass. However, the bill will then quickly go to a House-Senate conference committee, which is expected to complete its work before Christmas. The House earlier zeroed out new nuclear weapons funding and may insist on doing so in conference committee. A partial or complete victory for nuclear restraint is possible in the final bill coming out of the conference committee. The result will depend in part on how much opposition Senate Appropriations Committee members hear from their constituents.

Please contact your two senators today, especially if either is on the Senate Appropriations Committee. You can view this list on our web site by going to the Presby Legislative Action Center and clicking on "Congressional Directory," and then selecting the Senate Appropriations Committee from the drop-down list.

Urge your senators to oppose funds for new nuclear weapons in the omnibus appropriations bill. Tell them that new nuclear weapons will not make the world more secure. Developing new nuclear weapons will send the wrong signal to the rest of the world that nuclear weapons are usable. In the long run, pursuing new nuclear weapons will undermine U.S. security.

Contacting your congressperson is easy. You can call his or her office in Washington, DC using a phone number listed on our web site. You can also fax or email him or her from the Washington Office web site.

--Catherine Gordon

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Dear _____

I urge you to vote to remove all funds for the Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator (RNEP) and "advanced concepts" for nuclear weapons from the omnibus appropriations bill.

* The development of a Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator would have disastrous consequences for the international arms control regime. While the administration is criticizing others for developing their own nuclear weapons, it is enhancing its own weapons complex. This "do what I say, not what I do" policy is evident to all. If nuclear weapons are unacceptable for Iran and North Korea, they are unacceptable for the U.S.

* The RNEP would have a yield up to 70 times that of the bomb detonated over Hiroshima. If detonated in an urban setting, tens of thousands of people could receive a fatal dose of radiation within the first 24 hours. More would be killed or injured by the extreme pressures of the blast and thermal injuries arising from the heat of the explosion. Still more casualties would result from the resulting fires and the collapse of buildings from the seismic shock that the explosion would produce.

* Developing new types of nuclear weapons for battlefield use blurs the distinction between conventional and nuclear arms. This is a dangerous threshold which neither the U.S. nor any other country should cross again.

Thank you for your consideration.

Background: Some civilian military planners and nuclear scientists are promoting the creation of a new class of earth-penetrating nuclear weapons. These weapons are sometimes referred to as "bunker busters" because they would be designed to burrow into the ground to destroy underground military facilities that are protected by 100 to 300 feet of reinforced concrete or rock. The Energy Department's fiscal year 2005 (FY05) budget includes \$27.6 million for the Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrator (RNEP). The RNEP would use an existing nuclear weapon, redesigned for use against underground bunkers. It would have explosive power up to 70 times that of the bomb that destroyed Hiroshima.

RNEP proponents claim that, because the weapon penetrates the earth before detonating, it would be a "clean" nuclear weapon. In reality, this would be an extremely deadly weapon. If detonated in an urban setting, tens of thousands of people could receive a fatal dose of radiation within the first 24 hours. More would be killed or injured by the extreme pressures of the blast and thermal injuries arising from the heat of the explosion. Still more casualties would result from the resulting fires and the collapse of buildings from the seismic shock that the explosion would produce. According to Sen. Jack Reed (RI), Robust Nuclear Earth Penetrators, "are really city breakers, not bunker busters."

The Bush administration has repeatedly claimed that the RNEP program is a study and nothing more. However, the administration's intentions

regarding RNEP go well beyond their initial claims. Energy Department budget documents show funding for RNEP increasing dramatically after this year. The initial three-year study was to cost \$45 million, but the administration's proposed spending in the next five years would total nearly \$500 million and move RNEP into early development and engineering stages.

The U.S. has rightly criticized Iran and North Korea for their nuclear weapons programs. The U.S. has expressed concerns about the nuclear programs in India and Pakistan. There is also a growing fear that nuclear materials could fall into the hands of a violent extremist group, such as al Qaeda. Yet U.S. criticism rings hollow as the U.S. resumes its own nuclear weapons development programs.

The Bush administration is leading the world down the wrong path. Instead of adhering to our obligations under the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) by reducing reliance on the most horrific weapons ever created and working for global disarmament, the administration is seeking new uses for nuclear weapons. Adopting such a nuclear posture is a step backward and a virtual invitation for other nations to opt out of their NPT obligations as well.