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**CLOSURE OF DOE's FAST FLUX TEST FACILITY
IS A LONG-OVERDUE DEATH SENTENCE
FOR U.S. PLUTONIUM BREEDER REACTOR PROGRAM**

Washington--The decision by U.S. Secretary of Energy Spencer Abraham to permanently shut down the Fast Flux Test Facility (FFTF) is a clear nuclear non-proliferation victory and closes the book on the nation's misguided flirtation with the plutonium breeder reactor, the Nuclear Control Institute declared today.

"Hundreds of millions of dollars have been wasted keeping this dinosaur alive since the first decision to shut it down in 1992," said NCI Executive Director Tom Clements. "The closure of FFTF brings to a conclusion U.S. pursuit of plutonium breeder reactors, a type of reactor which can explode in the event of a core meltdown and which should be shunned because it produces weapons-grade plutonium. One can only wonder what took the U.S. Government so long to bring this dangerous chapter of nuclear history to a close. We encourage Washington to now advise Russia, Japan and India, the only countries left with breeder programs, to halt their own programs involving this dangerous and proliferation-prone technology."

Great Britain cancelled its commercial breeder in 1994 after years of trouble operating its experimental breeder. France halted operation of its commercial Superphenix breeder reactor in 1996 after several years of operation during which the reactor was down for safety reasons far more than it was up and running. India's breeder has been trouble-prone and has barely operated. Japan is attempting to restart its controversial Monju demonstration breeder which shut was down within one month of startup in 1995 after a sodium leak and fire caused a near-catastrophic accident. Russia continues to operate its BN-600 breeder near Ekaterinberg, Siberia despite numerous sodium fires but may not be able to continue operating this dangerous plant without foreign subsidies.

The FFTF, a sodium-cooled fast reactor at the Energy Department's Hanford Reservation in Washington state, was the cornerstone of the U.S. breeder reactor fuel testing program and also tested fuel for Japan's Monju breeder. But it has been a reactor in search of a mission since cancellation of the commercial Clinch River Breeder Reactor at DOE's Oak Ridge site in the early 1980s. The FFTF has been on stand-by ever since former Energy Secretary Hazel O'Leary attempted to shut it down in 1992.

The Washington State Congressional delegation, led by Rep. Doc Hastings, succeeded in blocking closure and then led an intense effort to find a reason to restart it--most recently as an isotope-production reactor. However, Abraham informed Hastings yesterday that no market could be found for the isotopes and that it would cost \$2 billion to refurbish the reactor in any event.

"Keeping this last vestige of the breeder program on stand-by wasted over \$400 million, money that should have been spent on shutdown and on waste cleanup at Hanford," said Clements. "Congratulations are due to Secretary Abraham for making the right decision to close the FFTF. We hope he will now seek to discourage breeder programs in other countries, especially Japan, which wants to run its breeder on plutonium derived from U.S.-supplied fuel, and Russia, which is looking for U.S. dollars to run its breeder on plutonium-uranium mixed oxide (MOX) fuel to dispose of surplus warhead plutonium. Both Russia and the United States should dispose of their weapons

plutonium via immobilization in nuclear waste, a far cheaper, safer and more secure method than processing it into fuel for reactors."

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