

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

The NMD test this Weekend:

A miss doesn't prove it won't work; a hit doesn't prove it will work

July 13, 2001

Dear Colleague:

We don't see eye to eye on most aspects of missile defense, but we do agree on the importance of testing, and concur that many tests remain before a national missile defense (NMD) system is deployed.

Late on Saturday night, July 14, the Ballistic Missile Defense Organization (BMDO) will conduct a test of the ground-based NMD. The test, called IFT-6, is the fourth intercept test of the system, and will test many elements representing a future operational system: space-based early warning sensor; ground-based early warning, tracking and discrimination radars; battle management, command, control and communication; in-flight communication system and the interceptor missile and kill vehicle.

We are writing to urge you not to rush to judgment on the test result, whether it is positive or negative. As BMDO Director Gen. Ronald Kadish testified before the Armed Services Committee on June 14, "I do not believe it is helpful to overplay our successes or failures." A miss on Saturday night will not prove the system won't work; a hit does not prove the system will work.

Gen. Kadish noted that other missile development programs encountered several early failures: "the Atlas ICBM program experienced 12 failures in its 2 ½ year flight-testing history, and the Minuteman I program suffered 10 failures in a 3 ½ year testing program." Atlas completed 36 tests before deployment, and Minuteman I had 54 tests. Saturday's test will be only the fourth NMD intercept test.

Again, we counsel our colleagues, missile defense advocates and skeptics alike, not to rush to conclusions about the result of this weekend's NMD test.



Curt Weldon
Armed Services Committee

Sincerely,



Tom Allen
Armed Services Committee