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## Science & Technology

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# U.S. views conflict at AIF fusion conference

by Marsha Freeman

The future of nuclear fusion as a source of unlimited supply of energy was debated at a conference sponsored by the Atomic Industrial Forum (AIF) May 3-6. What emerged at that meeting is that while Japanese and European representatives are strongly committed to developing an operational fusion reactor by the 1990s, the U.S. program is jeopardized by the Reagan administration's commitment to cutting the budget for scientific research and development to the bone.

The world fusion community had optimistically expected a strong program to be led by the United States following the passage of the McCormack bill, the Magnetic Fusion Energy Engineering Act of 1980, sponsored by former Rep. Mike McCormack of Washington State. The McCormack bill commits the United States to develop a commercial demonstration fusion reactor by 2000, and mandates Congress to spend \$20 billion over the next 20 years to achieve that goal. Instead, the fight in Congress is to restore cuts made in the Department of Energy's (DOE) fusion budget, cut from \$525 million to \$460 million in Reagan's fiscal 1982 budget.

The strong dissension between those in the DOE itself who favor an "Apollo-style" crash development program and the "cost-benefit" budget-cutters, who say the R&D emphasis must be on relatively low-technology conventional military weaponry, instead of basic scientific research, was expressed in remarks made to the AIF conference by DOE fusion director Dr. Edwin Kintner, and by the DOE acting director of the Office of Energy Research, Dr. N. Douglas Pewitt.

Dr. Kintner expressed dismay at the cuts in the fusion program, now "less dramatic or rapid than we had hoped." "Fusion is unique. It is a test of the ability of society and the government to marshal resources for a long-term program that has no military justification. It's difficult to see this kind of progress and conclude that it can't be done."

Dr. Pewitt urged a go-slow approach and stated that

the proposed Center for Fusion Engineering, to be run by industry for the DOE, "will not be considered until all the information is available or until it is absolutely necessary."

Pewitt's view was challenged by nearly all the speakers at the conference. Dr. Harold K. Forsen, president of Jersey Nuclear Isotopes and Exxon Nuclear, called fusion a "national commitment." He stated, "This is a \$20 billion program over 20 years. It is a national commitment. Fusion people should report to someone on the assistant secretary level, or a NASA-administrator type of manager. The Office of Fusion Energy in the DOE should report to the same high-level manager and continue to oversee the physics research."

Former Rep. Mike McCormack, who addressed a luncheon session of the conference, expressed hopes that "everyone will commit themselves to work enthusiastically for the year 2000 goal of commercial demonstration of fusion, the same as Jack Kennedy did for the goal to reach the Moon." Fusion is "of paramount concern for our nation's security, stability, increasing economic health, and the security and stability of the world."

"This is a fundamental chance for world peace," McCormack stressed. "We have a moral obligation to future generations to hold for them their share of the world's precious hydrocarbons." Fusion, whose fuel, hydrogen, is derived from water, "will bring us abundant supplies of energy, of water, of minerals not now worth developing. It is not responsible to wait" to implement the fusion bill. "We are in critical danger of even deeper budget cuts in fusion," McCormack emphasized. "We need a public protest. Most people in this country have not been informed of the damaging possibility of these budget cuts. . . . We've been conditioned not to stand up and fight. Fusion is real. We know it will succeed."

According to Dr. Allan Mense, the battle over the fusion budget is not finished. Mense is the fusion staff member of the House Subcommittee on Energy Research and Production formerly chaired by McCormack and now headed by Rep. Marilyn Bouquard of Tennessee. Mense stated, "The fiscal year 1982 budget in no way reflects Congress's view of fusion." He stressed that "the Japanese are planning for future generations. We have to look 100 years ahead like the Japanese."

Dr. Kenzo Yamamoto, a member of the Nuclear Fusion Council of the Japan Atomic Energy Commission and an adviser to the Japan Atomic Energy Research Institute, which conducts Japan's major fusion tokamak research, confirmed that Japan is considering having its Fusion Experimental Reactor on line by the early 1990s. "We would begin construction in about 1988, and plan to burn deuterium-tritium fusion fuel by 1994-1995." In addition, he reported, five major Japanese nuclear reactor suppliers will be involved in the new machine.



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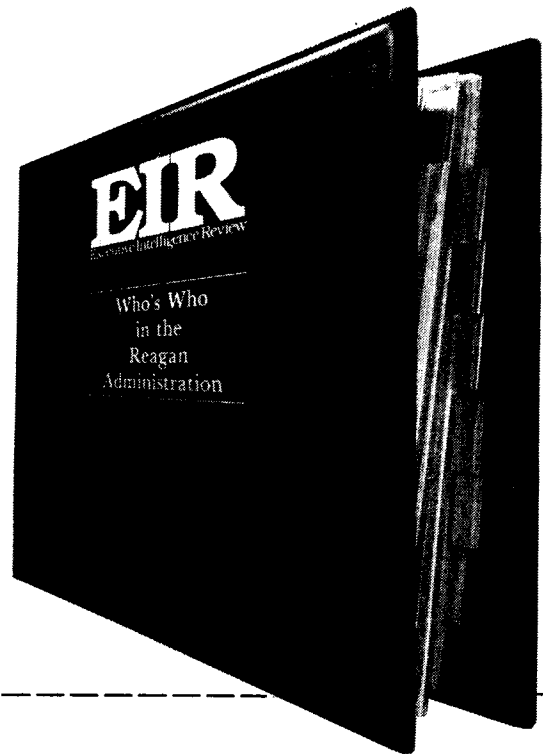
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