

Congressional Calendar

Antinuclear crisis mongering strikes Congress

In the wake of the Harrisburg "nuclear energy crisis" a wave of antinuclear crisis mongering has predictably erupted in Congress. Item: Senator George McGovern (D-S.D.) declared at a joint press conference April 4 with the environmentalist Union of Concerned Scientists, that he will propose legislation next Monday calling for a halt to any further licensing of nuclear plants until a review of all safety defects in nuclear reactors is completed. A similar demand was made in the last several days by Congressman Jeffords (R-Vt).

Item: Moves are afoot to repeal the Price-Anderson Act, which limits liability in the event of nuclear accidents. If this were repealed the cost of insuring nuclear plants would be so prohibitive that it would shut down the industry.

The courts recently threw out environmentalist efforts to nullify the bill on constitutional grounds, so the environmentalists have shifted their efforts to direct congressional repeal or modification of the act.

Congressman Morris Udall (D-Ariz) announced April 4 that he plans hearings after the April 12 recess that will focus on the "future role of nuclear energy in America" and whether or not to repeal Price-Anderson. Nuclear energy is extremely expensive, he said, and "Price-Anderson understates those costs."

New York Congressmen Ted Weiss and Hamilton Fish introduced legislation Jan. 15 to repeal the Act, and hope that the sentiment generated by the Harrisburg

hoax will suffice to push it through Congress.

Enter Ted Kennedy

On the Senate side, Senator Ted Kennedy (D-Mass) told the Council on Foreign Relations in New York April 2 that it was time to "reexamine whether it (nuclear energy) is centrally important." The former Harvard cheating case told the assembled Wall Street moghuls that there were "global nuclear weapons risks" from wide use of atomic energy. Two days later, Kennedy used the pretext of the dangers of nuclear energy to call for top-down government apparatus to handle "crises." At hearings he held on April 4 in his Health subcommittee, Kennedy — whose inability to drive a car safely led to the death of Mary Jo Kopechne at Chappaquiddick — declared "we have now seen the darker side of technology." He demanded creation of an agency to deal with such crises. At the hearings Kennedy was supported by Pennsylvania Republican Senator Richard Schweicker who called for a "nuclear crisis management team." Even conservative Senators like Orin Hatch (R-Utah) and Gordon Humphreys (R-NH) echoed this call, demanding a review of U.S. civil defense capability in light of Harrisburg. Watch for quick Congressional action on these proposals.

A voice of sanity

A voice of sanity on the question of the Harrisburg crisis came from Congresswoman-elect Deborah Hanania-Freeman. Testifying before the House Appropriations Committee on public works, Freeman declared on April 4,

"You must realize that the combination of events leading up to the Harrisburg hoax and the proposed Department of Energy budget (which focuses on solar energy — ed.) conclusively demonstrate that the real meaning of the budget and its related policies is not merely a question of antinuclear versus a pronuclear policy but of a military footing for the enforcement of global austerity."

Fight on over Carter's Alaskan land grab

Last year's withdrawal of 121 million acres from potential productive use by President Carter and the environmentalist lobby, which includes Secretary of the Interior Cecil Andrus, is now the subject of a legislative battle between Congress and the White House. At stake is trillions of dollars worth of mineral resources accessible to even existing technologies. The intent of Carter, Andrus, et al. is to lock away this mineral wealth permanently.

The vehicle the Administration had chosen to institutionalize Alaskan backwardness was H.R. 39, introduced by Morris Udall (D-Ariz.), chairman of the House Interior Committee. The Udall bill would have locked up even more land and resources than last year's presidential decree ran into a stonewall in the Senate when it was first introduced. To avoid a deadlock at the end of the session, some of the Senators involved, including Washington Democrat Henry Jackson and Alaskan Republican Ted Stevens, worked out a compromise. But the compromise was buried by the threat of

a filibuster from Alaskan Democrat Mike Gravel, who said he wanted leeway for more development in his state than allowed by either the bill or the compromise version. Given Gravel's own track record as an environmentalist, some observers aren't sure of his motivations.

Clearly, the Carter Administration itself wants the compromise killed.

But the compromise has been revived and given the form of legislation, now before the House Merchant Marine Committee, as H.R. 2199, or the Huckaby Bill. It will be on the House floor by April 30-May 4. It would create a Federal Lands Management System in Alaska, including parks, wildlife refuge systems, forestry lands, etc. totalling 99 to 120 million acres. These acres, however, would not impinge on mineral-rich areas, and the bill includes provisions to ensure overland transportation routes necessary for removal of the mineral resources.

It was a major defeat for Udall as chairman of the Interior Committee when his own committee rejected H.R. 39 in favor of the Huckaby bill. The reasons are not hard to comprehend.

The Alaskan landmass, a continuation of the mineral-rich Rocky Mountains, has phenomenal mineral wealth-potential, almost totally unexplored to date. Considering the Prudhoe Bay oil discoveries, the known resources on the Canadian side of the borders, and on the other side of the Bering Straits in Siberia, it is estimated that Alaskan mineral wealth available for exploitation through off-the-shelf technology is on the order of trillions of dollars.

In voting down H.R. 39 and voting up H.R. 2199, the Interior Committee's majority was simply voting up an economic future for the state of Alaska. If the Huckaby bill 2199 passes the House at the end of the month, the prospects for passage in the Senate are very good.

As a result, Secretary Andrus has informed Jimmy Carter that all hope of keeping Alaska a primitive and frosty wasteland and denying the nation the benefits of natural wealth, depends upon the President. Andrus has recommended that Carter veto the Huckaby compromise if and when it arrives on the President's desk.

Such action would allow the Presidential land grab of last year to stay in effect. On the basis of existing law, Carter caused 56 million acres of mineral-rich land to be assigned to "National Monuments," and 54 million more to be placed "under study" for possible designation as a National Wildlife Refuge. Eleven million additional acres were taken away from the Forestry Department for "study" leading to ward their addition to the possible wildlife refuge system. Most of these lands were in the southeastern portion of Alaska.

Balanced budget in the pipeline?

With the endorsement of only six more states needed to call a convention to authorize a constitutional amendment for a balanced budget, the Congress is under pressure to prove its commitment to the balanced budget lobby being spearheaded by the odd coalition of conservative Republicans and California Governor Jerry Brown's

"liberal" Democrats under the direction of Aspen Institute board member Robert O. Anderson.

Notwithstanding the fact that implementing a balanced budget at this point would shut down the U.S. economy, Congress has taken several steps towards a balanced budget. After several weeks of Budget Committee hearings on the issue, Congress this week endorsed two proposals that require both Congress and the President to offer legislators the alternative of a balanced budget to any other proposed budget. On April 2 the House voted up an amendment to the debt ceiling legislation, introduced by Senator Russell Long (D-La), that calls on Congress to offer a balanced budget proposal for 1981 and 1982 by April 15. This is to be reviewed and voted on as the first nonbinding concurrent budget resolution of Congress May 15. Although this will then be reviewed and revised significantly before it is passed in September as a binding budget, the resolution shows Congress' eagerness to move towards a slashed budget.

At the same time that this amendment was adopted, Congress also passed a proposal by Senator Packwood (R-Ore) that requires the President when submitting his budget, to include another budget that is balanced, for Congressional review.

— *Barbara Dreyfuss*