

Congressional Calendar

Emergency preparedness measures under scrutiny

In conjunction with the Carter Administration's activation of and centralization of the emergency preparedness apparatus under the National Security Council, which went into effect April 1, extensive Congressional activity on this issue is developing. Congressman Weaver (D-Ore) and Senator Gary Hart (D-Colo) have introduced an amendment to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission authorization bill that would prevent the NRC from licensing a new nuclear plant unless the state it was planned for had an extensive emergency measures program established. Hart has also proposed that existing nuclear plants be shut down within 6 months of adoption of the authorization if the state in which a plant is located does not have an emergency evacuation plan ready. Weaver will introduce this same amendment on the House floor.

At this time 16 states which have no emergency evacuation plans have nuclear plants operating. The NRC authorization with these amendments have passed the House Interior Committee and the Senate Environmental and Public Works Committee. House action is expected by July.

As well, the House Armed Services subcommittee on military installations is holding hearings May 15 and 16 on civil defense aspects of the Three Mile Island crisis.

At the same time Congressman Toby Moffitt (D-Conn) has been holding investigative hearings into the adequacy of current emergency planning for nuclear plant accidents. Using a recent General Accounting Office study which shows that only 10 states have a Nuclear Regulatory Commission approved

emergency plan, Moffitt's House Government Operations Subcommittee on Environment, Energy and Natural Resources has been investigating what such a plan looks like and its adequacy for "nuclear plant disasters." The subcommittee also investigated the extent to which the NRC has used its authority to force utilities to have their own detailed emergency plans. On May 7 the subcommittee heard from environmentalist guru Ralph Nader, as well as state and nuclear industry officials from South Carolina on emergency measures planning for the Oconee nuclear station. It held another hearing in White Plains, New York on the emergency planning for the Indian Point nuclear plant. On May 14 NRC chairman Hendrie testified. The Committee will shortly issue a report on their investigation into the extensiveness of emergency measures planning.

Opposition to Department of Natural Resources kills bill

President Carter's attempt to create a new Department of Natural Resources has met with such stiff resistance that he has dropped the idea for the rest of his term of office, according to Administration officials who asked not to be named. The proposal was drafted by the President's Reorganization Project, whose staff, largely from the Rand Corporation, also drafted the reorganization of the emergency preparedness agencies. The Natural Resources Department would have taken the U.S. Forest Service out of the Agriculture Department and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration out of the Commerce Department and put them into the new agency which

would amount to a beefed up Interior Department. This would have given the new agency control over development of extensive federal lands and off-shore mineral and oil and gas development. The measure was widely opposed by agriculture, industry, and forestry groups who saw the move as aimed at replacing policies oriented to technological and industrial development with environmentalism. Carter had attempted to assuage this opposition by introducing his measure as legislation rather than as a reorganization plan which would only need to escape congressional veto for 60 days in order to become law, but the opposition was still too strong for the Administration's plans.

Wheat cartel in the works?

What amounts to a wheat cartel is being put into place, after a meeting May 10 in Saskatchewan, Canada with the Agriculture secretaries of the U.S., Canada, Australia and Argentina, the four major world wheat producers. At the meeting the four agricultural secretaries agreed to maintain a high price for wheat, to not dump surplus wheat supplies, and to begin creating a wheat bank. These measures would give the fledgling cartel critical control over the flow and availability of this basic staple. Following the meeting, demands have already appeared in some major press outlets to the effect that wheat only be sold to OPEC nations in exchange for specified amounts of oil, and that wheat sales be used to enforce other economic policies on certain countries.

The final communiqué of the meeting declared that "in view of the increasingly important wheat consumption we encourage the

building of food stocks." Their aim is creation of a 15-20 million ton reserve stock of wheat. The Department of Agriculture has now informed members of the House and Senate Agriculture Committees that sometime in the latter half of May they can expect legislation from the Administration to establish a government-held wheat reserve of 4 million tons. They are urging Congress to pass the legislation on the basis that this will force the other wheat producers to do the same. The measure is widely opposed by the National Association for Wheat Growers. The four nations expect to meet again in June to discuss further developing the wheat reserve.

Synthetic fuels promoted

While the nuclear energy industry is under heavy attack, Congress is vigorously pursuing the development of extremely expensive and inefficient synthetic fuels, as well as various 19th century fuels such as wind power. On May 15 and 16 three House agriculture subcommittees will review various proposals for developing alcohol fuels. Congressman Richard Ottinger's (D-NY) subcommittee on Energy Development and Applications has a full agenda of hearings on these items. In June they will hold hearings on developing a wind energy program, and solar energy. In July this subcommittee will investigate various programs aimed at converting waste into heat and synthetic fuels, and will also hold hearings on such alternate fuels as coal liquification, tar sands oil, and alcohol fuels. Coal gasification as an energy source will be reviewed in the fall. During the second session of Congress the subcommittee also plans a

major discussion of how to bring such low-technology "alternative" energy programs to the underdeveloped countries.

Moves afoot to resume the draft

The House Armed Services Committee on May 10 endorsed an amendment to the Defense Authorization Bill that would require the President to establish a mechanism for the registration of all males 18 and over who could be called up for duty in the event of an emergency. The measure now goes to the Rules Committee where it could be out and on the House floor in as short a time as two weeks. The Senate is still in the process of marking up the legislation and it is uncertain whether a similar amendment will be added, or whether the issue will have to go to a conference committee for final action.

Helms, Stevenson apprehensive as Senate approves Camp David aid

By a margin of 73 to 11, the Senate approved the Administration's \$4.8 billion Camp David aid package to Egypt and Israel May 14. Leading the small group of opponents of the legislation, North Carolina Republican Jesse Helms warned that "this agreement is not a peace treaty at all." Reemphasizing the concerns expressed in a Senate speech March 27, Helms charged that the United States was potentially being drawn by the Israelis into "an economic and possibly military operation to crush the Arabs altogether." Helms added: "The building up of a powerful 100,000 man intervention force for the Mideast, now under

active consideration by Secretary Brown, might be another move in this direction. The establishment of a powerful new fleet in the Indian Ocean could be still a third step." Also significant in this context, Helms added, is "the construction of more American military bases in the area" and the mooted "reestablishment of the draft."

Helms called for a comprehensive settlement, including Israeli withdrawal from all occupied territories, and "to make the Middle East a nuclear free zone, to seek a ratification by all parties in the area that nuclear war is out of the question."

Illinois Democrat Adlai Stevenson concurred that the treaty would not and had not brought peace to the region. "I suggest a way to encourage the peace process instead of involving the U.S. expensively and dangerously in a process which could lead toward more instability in the Mideast, more economic dislocation in the world, more Soviet influence, and ultimately, war."

Also voting against the legislation authorizing U.S. aid to Egypt and Israel were Democrats Quentin Burdick (ND), Russell Long (La), John Melcher (Mont), and William Proxmire (Wisc). Republicans voting against the bill included, besides Helms, Barry Goldwater (Ariz), Mark Hatfield (Ore), James McClure (Idaho), and Milton Young (ND). Independent Harry Byrd (Va) also opposed the measure.

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with Susan Kokinda,
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