

Exclusive: McCormack talks on fusion power

by Kathy Stevens

The Soviet Union is closing in on the development of particle beam weapons systems as the effective means of developing an ABM capability.

This was the gist of recent testimony given behind closed doors to staff and members of the House and Senate Armed Services committees by General George Keegan, the former head of Air Force Intelligence, and aerospace industry specialists. Their conclusion is further corroborated by Western European intelligence sources who estimate a deployment capability within two years.

What are the implications of this reported breakthrough? First, an ABM capability depends on the overall functioning of an integrated system that includes satellites for monitoring or tracking, advanced radar networks, cheap and effective conventional missiles with sophisticated guidance and warheads, laser beam weapons and particle beams.

Second, such capabilities imply a depth and a basic scientific underpinning, a point which General Keegan, in particular, chooses to ignore in advocating an "wunderwaffen" approach to matching Soviet advances in military technology.

Third advanced capabilities in depth can only be developed on the basis of a strong civilian economy where industry is coupled to a large and growing science and technology effort.

On all three points, there must be a fundamental change in economic and foreign policy if the United States is to develop and apply the science and technologies required to match reported Soviet capabilities. A case in point concerning U.S. policy is what has hap-

pened to the U.S. nuclear research and development program since the incident at Three Mile Island nearly a year ago. More than a dozen nuclear plants have been shut down since Three Mile Island. All nuclear reprocessing facilities have been closed. And new regulations are under consideration that would prevent any plant within a 10 mile radius of a city, stop new construction until evacuation plans have been worked out and even shut down nuclear power altogether.

The only serious fight to come forward since the events at Three Mile Island has been from the LaRouche for President campaign and the office of conservative Washington Democrat Mike McCormack. The congressman has introduced into the House a bill, H.R. 6308, establishing a national commitment for an Apollo-style program to develop a commercial fusion power reactor before the year 2000 at an estimated cost of \$20 billion. The bill has 140 cosponsors including House Majority leader Jim Wright and Minority leader John Rhodes. It is estimated that, at minimum, it will result in immediate funding for fusion research and development above the Carter administration's fiscal 1981 budget request.

If harnessed, fusion, the reaction that powers the sun, would provide a cheap and virtually limitless source of energy for an expanding economy. The fundamental research involved in the development of fusion technology touches on questions at the frontiers of physical science.

McCormack, after a 20 year career as a research scientist at the Hanford Project, one of the U.S.A.'s

leading nuclear research facilities, was elected to the United States Congress from the Fourth District of Washington in 1970 and has been reelected four times. McCormack currently serves as chairman of the Energy Research and Production Subcommittee of the House Science and Technology Committee and is known as one of the most knowledgeable and vigorous proponents of high-technology energy production in Washington, D.C.

In conversation with *EIR*'s energy codirector Marsha Freeman, Rep. McCormack discussed some of the implications of a crash program for thermonuclear fusion.

A conversation with McCormack

Q: How willing will industry be to get involved in something like a large-scale fusion project?

A: I believe that industry is going to need the assurance from the administration and from the Congress that the programs will be carried out and managed and continued responsibly before we'll have very much industrial money in these programs. This is going to take some time and some real, visible commitment and a degree of public support that will guarantee that commitment would continue from one administration to the next.

Q: And that was much of the purpose of your fusion bill?

A: Yes, that's right. Obviously any 20-year program is going to run through several administrations and we need to make it a matter of national commitment that everyone understands. We must, above everything else, abandon this idea that we can change our long-range mainline energy programs with each new administration.

Q: What would your feeling be on the economic payback to the economy?

A: One can look at the long-range implication—having a new and extremely important, overwhelmingly important energy production technology. That's the major payoff. The second implication is that in the intermediate term, starting almost at once, you have additional benefits in superior technology as far as nuclear fission is concerned. Third, these programs provide money pumped into the American economy and provide jobs for researchers, scientists and engineers, and vendors and fabricators. In that sense, even if one doesn't assign an intermediate or long range value to these programs, they still are just as valuable to society in the immediate timeframe, or in the next few months, as a CETA program or any other program which results in hiring people.

Q: My understanding is that most of the energy technology programs of the Energy Department will not really

be very much affected by budget cuts.

A: I think if one wishes to be quite cynical about it one can ask what percentage of federal expenditures does one wish to have spent for no benefit, what percentage for immediate benefit, how much for long-range benefit. Certainly the research and development programs have both immediate and long-range benefit, and sometimes intermediate benefits, too.

Q: How do you see what you're doing intersecting the national discussion that is taking place on energy policy?

A: I hope it's providing some influence. I have taken it upon myself to provide some information to each of the presidential candidates, or to most of the presidential candidates, on fusion and my fusion legislation. I intend to continue to provide information on major energy-related subjects that may become political issues, so that candidates will have the facts and not get themselves in a position that they would make unfortunate statements based on lack of information.

Q: Using the phrase, "an Apollo-style program for fusion" does go back to a time when there was a tremendous amount of government-vectored investment in high technology areas. . . .

A: Between then and now, the difference is not so much in dollars as in commitment.

Q: France's President Giscard d'Estaing is trying to set up a number of bilateral and multilateral agreements with the oil-producing countries to ensure that France and other Western European countries have an assured, reasonably priced supply of oil. I think he has been able to do that because of the commitment to export technology to these countries.

A: I think this is quite valuable. I have toyed with the idea of trying to sell energy credits, to buy oil with energy coupons cashable in the future, in the 21st century. We would pay part of the price of the oil—instead of paying \$30 per barrel we'd pay \$15 and give the other in energy credits in terms of 21st century provision of fission or fusion production machines in those countries that over a reasonable length of time could produce the same amount of energy. I think if we had an appropriate degree of imagination in this administration we would look seriously at that. It would save us a great deal of money now and provide them with energy then.

Q: One thing that impressed me in your bill was your reference to the export of fusion technology when it is available. Would this provide the basis for some kind of reasonable trade agreements.

A: It's critically important. We should think of fusion as being for all mankind right from the start. It can be the most important deterrent to war in all of history.