

Energy Insider by William Engdahl

Why do we need the breeder?

Political short-sightedness could destroy America's chance to break the energy-supply blackmail.

In a vote which surprised some and pleased the anti-nuclear advocates of the Sierra Club and Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission voted on May 17 again to refuse a Department of Energy request for waiver in order to permit preliminary work to begin on the Clinch River Breeder Reactor near Oak Ridge, Tennessee.

The vote is being played up as another step toward finally cutting the tiny breeder allocation of some \$252 million from next year's federal budget.

On the surface, the situation is relatively simple. The generally pro-nuclear Reagan administration has been battling, albeit ineffectively to date, to revive nuclear development from the debacle of Jimmy Carter's Trilateral Commission-scripted policies.

The President's newest appointee to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Jim Asselstine, presumably an honest, intelligent, and therefore "pro-nuclear" commissioner, now gives Reagan a theoretical three-to-two majority to begin breaking the ludicrous NRC roadblock. The anti-nuclear Sierra and NRDC petitioned Asselstine to abstain so as to not "create the impression of a rapid and unreflective effort" to reverse a March vote. May 17 was the deadline to reverse. Asselstine rejected the NRDC request, asserting correctly he was not responsible for his speedy ap-

pointment, but then voted "no" to "avoid serious concerns about my . . . objectivity," rather than voting on merit. Let's hope Mr. Asselstine is less swayed by political pressure in the future.

Some history of the Clinch River Breeder reactor is in order. During four years of anti-nuclear pressure from the Carter administration, Congress defied the demands of Carter James Schlesinger, and the Trilateral Commission. It insisted on funding Clinch River while Carter kept construction from proceeding. Now, Reagan is moving to break ground, saving about six months of costs by beginning preliminary roadbuilding and site clearance. To date, about \$1 billion of a total of \$3.2 billion to build the first U.S. full-scale 325 megawatt demonstration breeder, has been spent on components, awaiting a construction go-ahead.

Certain Congressmen and other dimwitted individuals argue for killing the breeder, claiming that with such unexpected cutbacks in nuclear light-water reactor construction over the last four years, we will have enough uranium to provide our needs.

The breeder is so named because it basically produces (or breeds) more fuel than it consumes. During the early years of the Atoms for Peace effort in the 1950s, breeders and reprocessing were accepted as the only intelligent way to create enough energy for the world's de-

velopment. Commercial breeding, combined with reprocessing of unused portions of spent fuel rods from conventional reactors, will give the world about a 60-fold increase in useable uranium supply.

In effect, the Clinch River design is one of a precious few in the world, the French Phénix and the as-yet-uncompleted Super-Phénix being the most advanced. The technology is proven. However, under a hostile Club of Rome-influenced Mitterrand government, commercialization of the French breeder is hardly secure. Because of a serious problem within the pro-nuclear Schmidt government, centering around Interior Minister Gerhard Baum, the West German Kalkar breeder is in serious jeopardy now. Japan and the U.S.S.R. are proceeding; but Clinch River has the world's most seismically stringent design according to industry experts, and thus offers an important prototype for commercialization.

The U.S. uranium industry today is nearing a state of collapse, with many properties being bought up by firms such as Rio Tinto Zinc, the architect of the illegal and highly secret London Uranium Cartel, which uses South African, Canadian, and Australian market dominance to run the world price up or down parallel to OPEC oil prices. This London cartel is only too eager to see Clinch River die: that would mean a choke on energy resources by the British-dominated multinational oil faction. The same people financially back the Aspen Institute to halt nuclear growth.

Clinch River is not some "symbol" of American commitment to nuclear energy as some have portrayed it, it is *essential* to that commitment.