

LES AUCOIN
1ST DISTRICT, OREGON



CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20515

September 22, 1980

Dear Colleague:

On Wednesday, the House will take up the Pacific Northwest Electric Power Planning and Conservation Act, S. 885 (H.R. 8157), which has been reported by the Interior and Commerce committees. Because this bill will have a significant impact on the Northwest and my district, I want to state my concern about the bill and to urge your support for an amendment I intend to offer on the floor.

My amendment says that before the Bonneville Power Administrator acquires the power from any new nuclear generating facility, there must be in operation a federally licensed waste storage facility. While this amendment was unsuccessfully offered in the Energy and Water Resources Subcommittee and then again in full committee, I believe the issue it deals with has overriding importance to the people of the region and that a decision by the entire House is warranted.

The bill has many almost irresistible attractions -- electricity rate relief for private utility customers, region-wide energy planning, enhancement of salmon and steelhead runs on the Columbia River, and priorities for energy conservation and alternative energy resources. But it exacts a price.

It asks the people of our region to accept new nuclear plants by making them financially attractive to build and, more important, it does so without addressing the problem of the radioactive waste these plants will create. This is unacceptable.

Nuclear waste safety must come before nuclear plant construction. This isn't too much to ask. Indeed, a majority of the residents of my district agreed with this view in responding to my annual questionnaire. In that poll, fully 70 percent of the respondents -- whether they were for or against going ahead with nuclear power -- expressed concern for improved safety, civil evacuation plans, and storage of radioactive wastes. My amendment responds to those concerns.

Some will argue that this amendment affects national policy and should not be attached to legislation of a regional nature. This is not so. Under the provisions of the regional power bill, we will determine the energy future of the northwest for years to come -- whether we have an aggressive conservation program, whether we embark on a program of alternative energy development, whether we build nuclear plants. Even though our policy for handling nuclear waste may have to emanate from Washington, the problems of handling radioactive material from new nuclear plants are ones that the region must live with. If a temporary radioactive waste storage pool leaks at the Trojan nuclear plant -- which is Oregon's only nuclear plant and in my district -- it would be a problem for the bureaucrats in Washington. But for the people of Columbia County who live around the plant, it would be a catastrophe.

My amendment is a reasonable and responsible proposal. I urge your support for it.

With best regards,

Sincerely,

LES AUCOIN
Member of Congress