

Alaska Pipeline: Congress Deaf to Environmentalists

The environmental coalition opposing the trans-Alaska pipeline (TAP) is having trouble making itself heard over all the alarmed cries about an energy crisis, and, even when it is heard, it is often not believed. This seems to be the meaning of the coalition's weak showing on the recent series of votes in the U.S. Senate related to the pipeline.

Just how badly things were going for the coalition first became apparent on 13 July when the Senate voted down, by 61 to 29, the Mondale-Bayh amendment to the pending federal lands right-of-way legislation. This amendment, offered by Walter Mondale of Minnesota and Birch Bayh of Indiana, would have left it to Congress to select the route for transporting North Slope oil, a decision to be made within 60 days of the completion of an 8-month study by the National Academy of Sciences weighing TAP against a trans-Canada pipeline.

On 17 July, the coalition's campaign against TAP suffered further reverses. As expected, Henry M. Jackson of Washington, chairman of the Interior Committee, easily won Senate approval of his bill granting the Secretary of the Interior broad authority to permit and regulate use of federal lands for rights-of-way for pipelines, electric transmission lines, canals, railroads, and other facilities. One effect of the bill would be to eliminate the provision contained in existing law that limits right-of-way to a width of 50 feet. According to a federal appeals court, this limitation precludes issuance of a right-of-way permit for TAP.

Earlier this year the anti-TAP forces, known as the Alaska Public Interest Coalition, had hoped to defeat the Jackson bill, but, long before the Senate vote, leaders of the coalition knew that its passage was certain. Indeed, it now appears doubtful that the coalition even can keep Congress from exempting issuance of the TAP permit from further judicial review under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

Before final action on the Jackson bill itself, the Senate, by 49 to 48, approved an amendment granting the TAP right of way, with no further review to be possible under NEPA. This was a surprising victory for the amendment's principal sponsor, Mike Gravel

of Alaska, for, as father of NEPA, Jackson had wanted no precedent-setting departures from that statute. Many senators apparently were persuaded that early construction of TAP is required by the energy crisis.

The anti-TAP coalition now faces a discouraging prospect in the House of Representatives. There, John Melcher of Montana, chairman of the public lands subcommittee, is sponsoring a federal lands right-of-way bill which, like the amendment by Senator Gravel, would exempt issuance of a TAP permit from further court review under NEPA. This measure is cosponsored by a majority of the members of both the public lands subcommittee and its parent body, the Interior Committee. On top of this, the Speaker of the House, Carl Albert of Oklahoma, is supporting the bill, as is the Republican Minority Leader, Gerald Ford of Michigan.

Leading the opposition to the Melcher bill are John Anderson of Illinois, chairman of the House Republican Conference, and Morris Udall, an Arizona Democrat and the first representative or senator to propose that Congress should have an independent study made of the pipeline routing issue and then decide whether this facility is to go. Their bill incorporating the Udall concept is, for the moment at least, given little chance of prevailing over the Melcher bill, especially if the pipeline issue reaches the House floor before the August recess.

What the environmentalists are hoping is that the question can be put off until September. By then, families will have returned home from vacation, much of the farm harvest will be in, and people will be less susceptible to fears—real or fancied—that gasoline supplies are going to run out. Also, the three environmental groups leading the anti-TAP coalition—namely, the Sierra Club, the Wilderness Society, and Friends of the Earth—will find it easier to stimulate letters against the TAP project once their members are home from vacation.

Still another hope of the environmentalists is that, given time, the oil industry will lose credibility and public support. Here, to cite an example of the kind of thing that could embarrass the industry, the environmentalists point to the recently disclosed Federal

Trade Commission staff report that accuses the major "vertically integrated" oil companies of unfair competition and of marketing practices which have contributed to gasoline shortages.

It is somewhat surprising that the environmentalists should have to grasp at such straws, for the case to be made for an independent evaluation of the merits of a trans-Canadian pipeline is substantial. The Department of the Interior already has issued a \$9-million, nine-volume environmental and economic impact study of the pipeline, but the adequacy of such a study is not best measured by its cost and its bulk. An early draft said that shipment of the oil across Canada would present fewer environmental drawbacks than the movement of the oil from the North Slope to Valdez (on the Gulf of Alaska) by pipeline, then from Valdez to West Coast markets by tanker. This important conclusion was unaccountably left out of the final report. The report also failed to answer convincingly competent opinion that not before the late 1980's will the West Coast be able to use all of the Alaskan oil, with the result that part of the oil will have to be marketed in Japan. A trans-Canada pipeline would bring the oil both to the West Coast and the fuel-short Midwest.

Furthermore, there is evidence that both the Administration and TAP supporters in Congress have made a deliberate effort to obfuscate rather than clear up the question of whether Canada would be receptive to a trans-Canada pipeline proposal. Indeed, Representative Anderson, who visited Ottawa in early June to learn directly of Canadian attitudes, has reported that the Department of State in effect told Canada's Ambassador to the United States, Marcel Cadieux, to stop meddling when his government sought to correct some misimpressions. The Mondale-Bayh amendment called for immediate U.S.-Canadian discussions of the pipeline question.

The near-collapse of the efforts to block the TAP in Congress may well reflect the skeptical mood of senators and representatives. "They tell us, 'you guys are just trying to delay,'" one leader of the coalition told *Science*. "I think, in the final analysis, nobody has believed us."—LUTHER J. CARTER