

categorized as very large corporations in terms of both total assets and spending on R&D.

Treasury acting assistant secretary for tax policy Ronald A. Pearlman, who testified at the Ways and Means oversight subcommittee hearing on 2 August, said that the Administration favors extending the tax credit for an additional 3 years, but wants the credit tied more closely to those activities "that are likely to result in technological innovations."

The R&D tax credit will expire next year at a time when congressional efforts to beard the huge federal deficit will likely sharpen the debate over whether the R&D credit costs in revenue are worth the still-ambiguous benefits they bring to innovation.

—JOHN WALSH

## Congressmen Seek Halt to Plutonium Shipment

Fifteen members of Congress have signed a joint letter to President Reagan asking him to hold up a shipment of 189 kilograms of plutonium—enough to make 30 nuclear explosives—from France to Japan. They are concerned that the shipment will set a poor precedent, and argue that it should be delayed at least until a safe means of transporting the material by air—rather than by sea, as currently proposed—has been developed.

Formal U.S. approval is required because the plutonium was separated from reactor fuel that was enriched in the United States, and the U.S. government has ultimate authority over its final use.

Some 2 years ago, Japan proposed to ship the material in a container on a cargo vessel, but the United States objected. The current plan is to transport it on a dedicated vessel with an escort force including U.S. military units in some areas, "to minimize response times in the event of an incident," according to a statement by the Department of Energy. In addition, the ship will be equipped with sophisticated communications systems, including satellite tracking systems.

The Administration is now satisfied with the security, which was worked out in part by the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, and on 20 July Energy Secre-

tary Donald Hodel notified Congress that the United States would give its approval to the shipment.

The congressional letter commends the Administration for insisting on these extraordinary security measures, but questions whether they are adequate. "Shipments of nuclear explosive materials would provide tempting targets for attack by terrorists or even certain countries seeking to quickly acquire significant quantities of nuclear weapons materials."

In particular, the letter points out that shipment by air would be potentially more secure because it "would reduce from weeks to hours the time shipments would be at risk." Containers suitable for air shipment are under development and are expected to be ready for use "within a few years or less," the letter states.

The congressional critics are also concerned about the precedent set by the shipment, which will be by far the largest consignment of plutonium ever transported in international commerce.

The material is intended for use in the Joyo experimental fast breeder reactor, but according to a study done for Representative Richard Ottinger (D-N.Y.)—the prime mover behind the letter—by the Federation of American Scientists, Japan already has some 4 years' supply of plutonium available for its breeder program. The letter therefore criticizes the Administration for setting "an unfortunate precedent that physical need will not be a consideration in any decision to transport nuclear explosive materials." Approval "without a clear need could lead to future requests from other countries that could result in the accumulation of significant amounts of unneeded nuclear explosive materials in non-nuclear weapons countries," it states.

The Administration is required to notify Congress 15 days before the approval is due to take effect. It would require a special act of Congress to block the approval, however, and that is extremely unlikely.

In addition to Ottinger, the signatories included five senators—William Proxmire (D-Wis.), Gary Hart (D-Colo.), Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.), Carl Levin (D-Mich.), and Alan Cranston (D-Calif.)—and seven members of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs.—COLIN NORMAN

## U.S. Says Free Market Is Key to Population Policy

The American delegation to this month's population conference in Mexico City will be focusing most of its energies on promoting the free market as the route to improving life for the world's peoples. That was the message at a press conference held at the State Department by delegation chairman James Buckley, who currently heads Radio Free Europe in Germany.

The delegation of nine, including three advisers from the government, for the most part reflects the Administration's economic philosophy and anti-abortion stance. It contains no population experts and only one woman—Jacqueline E. Schafer of the Council on Environmental Quality, a former Buckley aide.

At the press briefing, Buckley stated that the American position does not constitute a radical departure from the past 20 years, as charged by population groups, but rather a "significant sharpening of focus." This sharpening includes a rejection of the "Malthusian pessimism" of Global 2000 (the controversial report authored by the Carter Administration), as well as "the assumption that world resources are finite." It also makes "encouragement of free economic development" a centerpiece of population policy.

Buckley declined to be more specific about any aspect of the United States position. Asked, for example, about the prohibition against giving money to any private organization "actively promoting" abortion, he said he could not define that phrase.

Buckley was specific about one matter, however. He indicated that there was no need for an increased commitment of money from the United States, which already supplies 44 percent of the international family planning effort.

Population groups have claimed that the American delegation is going to be an embarrassment to the nation with its preaching to other countries about their economies, and its emphasis on abortion, which most consider a peripheral issue. Said Buckley: "I can't think of anyone in my delegation who's going to be embarrassed."—CONSTANCE HOLDEN