HOUSE BILL REPORT
SJM 8029

As Reported By House Committee On:
Energy & Utilities

Brief Description: Requesting that the Hanford Fast Flux Facility be preserved.

Sponsors: Senators Loveland, Hale, Newhouse, Hochstatter, McCaslin, Sellar, Wojahn, Franklin, Haugen, Rinehart, Snyder, Owen, Spanel, Fraser, Sheldon, Fairley, Rasmussen, Heavey, McAuliffe, Prentice, Deccio and Roach.

Brief History:
Committee Activity:
Energy & Utilities: 2/20/96, 2/21/96 [DP].

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY & UTILITIES

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Casada, Chairman; Crouse, Vice Chairman; Hankins, Vice Chairman; Patterson, Ranking Minority Member; Poulsen, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Chandler; Kessler; Mastin and Mitchell.

Staff: Margaret Allen (786-7110).

Background: The Fast Flux Test Facility (FFTF) is a 400-megawatt, sodium-cooled, fast-flux test reactor owned by United States Department of Energy (USDOE) and located on the Hanford Reservation near Richland. "Fast flux" means the neutrons move faster in a sodium-cooled reactor than they would if the reactor were cooled with water. The FFTF was designed and operated as a test reactor and has no capability to generate electric power (although the steam it discharges conceivably could be captured and used if a steam-driven electricity generator were constructed nearby).

Built in 1980, the FFTF was designed primarily to test fuels and materials for advanced nuclear power plants, specifically the effects of radiation on fuels and materials. The FFTF also was used for research and testing of alloys and other materials for a variety of uses. Further, the FFTF was used to study and demonstrate isotope production. The FFTF was credited with producing, in 1986, the purest gadolinium-153 (used to diagnose osteoporosis) ever made. During the late 1980s, other isotopes reportedly were produced in the FFTF for cancer treatment and diagnostic research, and cardiovascular and brain studies.

After no long-term mission for the FFTF was identified, the USDOE placed the facility in standby status in April 1992. In late September 1993, a review team recommended the FFTF be shut down permanently.

A business group is attempting to purchase or lease the FFTF and use it to produce tritium for use by the Department of Defense, to produce medical and agricultural isotopes, and for other purposes.

More than 90 percent of the reactor-produced medical isotopes currently used in the United States are said to be imported.

Summary of Bill: The memorial calls on the President of the United States and Congress to ensure the restart, continued operation, and preservation of the FFTF.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Testimony For: The FFTF is the newest, most advanced reactor in the United States. With the shutdown of the FFTF, we have lost the ability to make medical isotopes and conduct important research. Ninety percent of all medical isotopes used in the United States are imported. We need to encourage USDOE to work with the community and private sector to ensure the restart of the FFTF.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Senator Loveland, prime sponsor; and Senator Sutherland.