

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HJM 4035

As Reported By House Committee On:

Agriculture & Ecology

Brief Description: Requesting that the Department of Energy remove the Port of Tacoma from the list of proposed sites for shipping nuclear fuel.

Sponsors: Representatives Hickel, Mitchell, Scheurman, Conway, Campbell and Regala.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Agriculture & Ecology: 1/29/96, 2/1/96 [DP].

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & ECOLOGY

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 16 members: Representatives Chandler, Chairman; Koster, Vice Chairman; Chappell, Ranking Minority Member; Linville, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Boldt; Clements; Delvin; R. Fisher; Honeyford; Johnson; Murray; Ogden; Regala; Robertson; Rust and Schoesler.

Staff: Jennifer Galvin (786-7349).

Background: The United States Department of Energy (DOE) has published a draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for a proposed policy to manage foreign research reactor spent nuclear fuel. The Port of Tacoma, Washington, is among potential receiving ports for shipments of spent nuclear fuel. Adoption of a new spent fuel management policy is considered a major federal action under the NEPA. The final EIS will contain the Department of Energy's preferred alternative after an extended public comment period. This document has been delayed and is scheduled to be out of the Department of Energy sometime February 1996.

Spent nuclear fuel contains high-level radioactive waste. The Department of Energy draft EIS cites concerns that the highly enriched uranium in spent nuclear fuel could be directly used to make simple nuclear weapons unless managed by the United States.

The draft EIS lists three management alternatives for the acceptance of foreign research reactor spent nuclear fuel. The first is to accept and manage the fuel in the

United States, the second is to facilitate the management of the fuel overseas, and the third is a combination of alternative #1 and alternative #2.

Under alternative #1, the Department of Energy estimates 721 caskets of spent nuclear fuel would be sent to the United States by ship over a 13-year acceptance period. The proposed shipments are subject to Department of Transportation regulation. The United States Coast Guard would inspect vessels for compliance with applicable regulations. Potential storage sites for the spent nuclear fuel include the Hanford Nuclear Reservation, the Idaho National Engineering Laboratory, the Nevada Test Site, the Oak Ridge Reservation in Tennessee, and the Savannah River Site in Georgia.

The Port of Tacoma, Pierce County, and the city of Federal Way have passed resolutions opposing the listing of Tacoma as a potential port of entry.

Summary of Bill: The Senate and House of Representatives of the State of Washington request that the Department of Energy remove the Port of Tacoma, Washington, from the list of proposed sites for the receipt and handling of foreign research reactor spent nuclear fuels.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: Strong opposition to the shipping exists in the south sound. The Department of Energy has failed to respond to numerous safety concerns. Shipping should be through military ports, not through highly populated civilian ports. Any port delays caused by the shipments would threaten the Tacoma economy.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Representative Tim Hickel, sponsor; and Representative Maryann Mitchell, sponsor (in favor).