

Senate Approves Energy Bill

After being kicked around the halls of Congress for four years, the Senate approved the energy bill by a vote of 74 to 26 on July 29, clearing the legislation for approval by President Bush, who plans to sign the bill soon. See how your senators voted: http://www.senate.gov/legislative/LIS/roll_call_lists/vote_menu_109_1.htm.

The bill is a smorgasbord of special interest giveaways for the fossil fuel and nuclear industries, which received more than two thirds of the \$14.5 billion in tax breaks, but it won't reduce America's dependence on foreign oil or lower gasoline prices.

"This energy bill is a simply stunning display of congressional indifference to our serious energy problems and an example of corporate welfare at its worst," said Public Citizen President Joan Claybrook. "Consumers will be stuck with higher gas and electricity prices, a more polluted and dangerous world, and a future without sustainable and renewable energy alternatives."

Attempts to block the bill ultimately failed. Sen. Russ Feingold (D-Wisc.) charged that the energy bill's steep price tag violated the Senate's budget rules, but the Senate voted 71 to 29 to waive the rules.

This bill, which will become law when the president signs it, does the following:

- * Repeals the Public Utility Holding Company Act (PUHCA), a vital protection for electricity consumers. PUHCA prevents the massive consoli-

Here lies the best
electricity consumer protection
act ever enacted by Congress:

THE PUBLIC UTILITY HOLDING COMPANY ACT



1935 - 2005

dation of unregulated utility ownership and prohibits non-utilities, such as oil companies, investment banks, and foreign companies, from owning public utilities.

- * Promotes a nuclear power relapse, lavishing the mature industry with billions of dollars in subsidies and other incentives that could cost taxpayers more than \$13 billion.

- * Federalizes the siting of liquefied natural gas importation terminals, stripping states of the right to oppose such projects.

- * Provides \$4.5 billion in tax breaks and more than \$7 billion in authorized subsidies to the fossil fuel industry and eases environmental regulations for oil and gas drilling and refining.

Absent from the final bill were measures to open the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil and gas explo-

ration, a product liability waiver for producers of the fuel additive MTBE that has contaminated groundwater across the nation, and fuel economy standards for automobiles.

Celebrities Speak Out on Capitol Hill Against Nuclear Power

On July 25, with the energy bill about to come before Congress for a final vote, and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) on the verge of approving a nuclear waste proposal known as Private Fuel Storage (PFS), Public Citizen held a briefing in the Capitol to oppose the energy bill and the related PFS proposal. The event was co-sponsored by Rep. Dennis Kucinich (D-Ohio), Nuclear Information and Research Service, and U.S. Public Interest Research Group, and featured musicians Ani DiFranco and the Indigo Girls (Amy Ray and Emily Saliers), actor James Cromwell, Native American leader Winona LaDuke, and Margene Bullcreek from the Skull Valley Goshute Tribe in Utah.

With 150 people in attendance, the speakers discussed the problems with nuclear power, the enormous potential



Musician Ani DiFranco speaks out against nuclear power at the July 25th congressional and press briefing.

of renewable energy, and the need to stop the unnecessary and unjust PFS proposal - which would dump 40,000 metric tons of radioactive waste on a Native American reservation in Utah.

“Right now we are standing at a critical crossroads in the history of our nation,” said Ani DiFranco. “In one direction we sacrifice the great American southwest to inevitable and irreversible radiation. In the other direction we stem the tide of pollution and disease by nuclear power conglomerates, and shift instead into sane and sustainable energy production. The choice is ours. The time is now.”

QUICK QUOTE



~ Anna Aurilio, legislative director for U.S. Public Interest Research Group, summing up the energy bill in Congress.

Latest Round of Exelon Merger Fight

A dozen groups filed an appeal on July 29 with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, protesting, among other things, the decision by FERC to approve the largest electric utility merger in history (between Chicago-based Exelon and New Jersey-based PSE&G) without holding a hearing. The groups include: Public Citizen, Action Alliance of Senior Citizens of Greater Philadelphia, Citizen Power, Energy Justice Network, Illinois PIRG, New Jersey Citizen Action, New Jersey PIRG, Pennsylvania PIRG, Service Employees International Union, SEIU New Jersey State Council, Three Mile Island Alert and the Utility Workers Union of America Local 601.

FERC will most likely reject the appeal, which will set the stage for a challenge that the groups plan to file in federal court.

The coalition opposes the merger because the combined company will control too much of the region's energy assets, making it easier for the companies to jack up rates for consumers.

Public Citizen Exposes New Mexico Company's Flawed Radioactive Waste Disposal Plan

The legal challenge being pursued by Public Citizen and the Nuclear Information and Resource Service (NIRS) is bringing to light the flawed radioactive waste disposal strategy of the company seeking a license to build and operate a uranium enrichment plant in southeastern New Mexico.

The public interest groups are engaged in an intervention against the license application of Louisiana Energy Services (LES), a European-led consortium, which they contend lacks a plausible strategy for the disposition and disposal of the very large quantities of depleted uranium (DU)-a long-lived radioactive and hazardous waste-that would be produced by the plant. The issue has become the most contentious concern in the licensing case.

Evaluations performed by Public Citizen and NIRS have shown that the waste disposal options presented by LES are not reasonable strategies to handle the massive amount of uranium waste that would be produced by LES's plant. The intervenors argue that sites in Texas and Utah identified by LES and the NRC as disposal options do not meet requisite regulatory requirements and are not suitable to contain DU waste. Cost estimates for waste disposal developed by LES are not reasonable because they are based on these implausible options.

Furthermore, a deal between LES and

the state of New Mexico to remove DU waste from the state may prove to be meaningless if the company transfers its waste to the U.S. Department of Energy, which is not regulated by the state or the NRC.

Public Citizen and NIRS will continue to challenge the license application and waste disposal plans of LES in hearings set for this fall.

NYC's Nuke Plant Steps Up...Finally

Entergy Corp., owner of the Indian Point nuclear plant about 30 miles north of New York City, finally relented on July 29 and agreed to install backup power sources for all 156 emergency alert sirens around the nuclear plant. The news comes not after such a common-sense idea was proposed by Public Citizen, NIRS, local governments, and others back in a February petition to the NRC, and not after threats by New York Senator Hillary Clinton to legislate such a plan, but after the sirens in question failed due to power outages twice in less than two weeks.

A Risky Line of Work

The largest study ever conducted on the health of nuclear workers has concluded that they run a higher risk for dying from cancer, according to a new study published in the *British Medical Journal*. Read about it here: <http://www.neimagazine.com/story.asp?sectioncode=132&storyCode=2029572>.