

## St. Louis Globe-Democrat Blasts 'Damaging Nuclear Energy Cuts'

*The following is the text of an editorial which appears in the March 1 issue of the St. Louis Globe-Democrat.*

### Damaging Nuclear Energy Cuts

President Carter's proposed cutbacks in the nation's development of the fast-breeder nuclear reactor and nuclear fusion power could slow these vital programs for a year or more.

*And if cuts of this magnitude continue — \$199 million from the breeder reactor and \$80 million from nuclear fusion — the two programs could be crippled and pushed back indefinitely. This is the assessment of a well-informed source in the government fusion program.*

What is so damaging about these cutbacks is that both programs have been showing excellent progress. The fast breeder reactor, which produces more atomic fuel than it consumes, has reached the stage where construction was due to begin on the first demonstration-size plant near Oak Ridge, Tenn., late this year.

This may be off now as the Carter Administration has called for a complete review of the program to determine if it is safe to continue. Environmentalists have contended that present technology can't safely handle the excess plutonium produced by the breeder reactor.

But, here again, these critics are laymen with virtually no expertise on the subject. Those who are developing the breeder reactor say that there are ways to handle the excess plutonium so that it won't become a threat to the environment.

From those in the best position to know, there is no valid reason for cutting back on development of these two successors to present nuclear fission energy. The breeder reactor is seen as the immediate successor of nuclear fission technology. Fusion power, however, is regarded as the "wonder fuel" of the 21st century.

*This is because nuclear fusion has these advantages over other energy sources: Its energy yield far exceeds*

*the energy needed to make the fusion reaction take place; fuels required for fusion reactors are almost unlimited; the cost of these fuels is low; the process is much safer than nuclear fission, and it is 10 to 100 times cleaner than nuclear fission.*

Although there has been little news on the subject, the development of fusion energy has been moving ahead at astounding speed. It was only a theory a few years ago but the Energy Research and Development Administration had scheduled the production of the first significant amounts of controlled thermonuclear fusion energy at the Tokamak fusion power reactor at Princeton University in 1981 until the proposed Carter cutback in funding was announced.

The \$80 million cutback will delay the historic demonstration by an estimated six to nine months. The ERDA program to generate electricity from fusion at a demonstration plant by 1986 or 1987 also may be out the window as a result of the budget reduction.

Instead of cutting back on fusion power, the Carter Administration should be going all out in developing this fantastic energy source as the Russians are. The Soviets today have 50 per cent more personnel working on developing fusion power than the United States and are reported to be at about the same stage of fusion development as the United States.

When the Carter Administration tosses around tens of billions of dollars for new make-work jobs and social welfare spending but cuts back on crucially important energy development programs it once again shows how confused its priorities are.

*Fusion power is the energy of the future. It is foolish and costly to try to sit on it. A nation as short of energy as the United States desperately needs the tremendous energy that fusion power can bring. It is projected that fusion power will supply the United States with nearly all of its electricity in the 21st century.*

*It will, that is, if President Carter doesn't stop it.*

## A Deadly Deal With The Devil

Senator Russell Long (D-La.), the chairman of the powerful Senate Finance Committee, has struck up a dangerous bargain with the Carter Administration. Over the weekend of March 5, Sen. Long surprised political observers with an announcement that he now favors a tax on oil, gas and electricity — a wellhead tax — a position heretofore unheard of for conservatives from oil-producing states. While Long and everyone else from Louisiana and Texas favor deregulation of interstate natural gas prices, Long is keenly aware that deregulation could result in shortages of *intrastate* natural

gas through a rapid bidding up of prices, both of which would destroy Louisiana industry. In a clever move to get deregulation and higher prices on the interstate market while ameliorating its effects on intrastate gas and local industry, Long has apparently joined forces with Carter's Naderites to get an interstate tax. Couching his real intent in the language of conservation, he declared, "Tax the oil and gas and the hydropower that is being produced and is being wasted... I think the President will recommend something like that. He ought to."