

## Editorial

# Fusion bill renews national purpose

The most important energy legislation of the decade has just passed the U.S. House of Representatives. H.R. 6308, the McCormack bill enacting a \$20 billion, 20-year national commitment to develop and commercialize thermonuclear fusion power by the year 2000, is exactly the type of program the U.S. economy requires to reverse the "post-industrial society" rot that has accelerated since the NASA space program was deemphasized.

If approved by the Senate and signed by the President, the bill will mark the first time since the NASA program to land a man on the moon that the United States will have embarked on a long-range science and technology program to ensure that the tools will be available to advance industrial development in the U.S. and export it abroad.

Rep. Mike McCormack, the bill's chief sponsor, has emphasized the unique character of fusion as an energy source. "Once we develop fusion," McCormack said, "we will be in a position to produce enough energy for all time, for all mankind. This is not hyperbole, but fact."

With that kind of mastery over nature at our command, the United States will at last have the means to fulfill the essence of the American Dream of putting freedom and prosperity within reach for the whole world within 20 years. The murderous, neo-Malthusian "era of limits" now planned for humanity by men of narrow vision—carrying with it the ever-present threat of nuclear holocaust—will quickly recede.

But the benefits of fusion are not "somewhere in the far-off future," available only to our posterity; we can start receiving them right here and now. The McCormack bill will mean a significant boost to the U.S. economy because it does more than set target dates and anticipate funding levels for U.S. energy research and development; it also sets a standard for maintaining U.S. leadership in science by supporting university science education programs, and for maintaining a broad-scale science and engineering effort in every promising field

of American magnetic fusion research.

Many Americans remember what the Project Apollo moonshot program did for American state-of-the-art technology, and have some idea of how important government-funded scientific and technological development was in creating an explosion of "improved productivity" benefits to the U.S. economy long before a man actually landed on the moon.

Before the Department of Energy fusion office is given the task of redoing its program plan to enable the country to meet the accelerated targets of the McCormack fusion bill, equivalent legislation must be passed by the Senate and signed by the President. Senator Tsongas (D-Mass.) introduced a fusion bill on July 2, S. 2926, which calls for accelerating the current DOE fusion timetable but has funding and advisory drawbacks.

The Tsongas bill, which underwent review and comment by the fusion scientific community in hearings Aug. 5, must be altered before it is put before the entire Senate for a vote. If there are substantial changes which bring the bill more in line with the House legislation, a time-consuming House-Senate conference negotiation could be avoided and the law brought to President Carter for his signature in late fall.

House sources have been concerned that the White House might look upon this \$20 billion 20-year commitment as antithetical to the administration's budget-cutting program, no matter how much cheap energy fusion would make available in the future. We believe that American business, industry and consumers ought to send the Senate and the President a forthright message that passage of the McCormack bill is the nation's top energy and economic priority—worth far more to the United States than the administration's own ill-conceived, expensive synfuels boondoggle and the corporatist restructuring of the U.S. economy which the administration apparently feels will be necessary in order to implement it.