

## Energy Insider by William Engdahl

### A plan to dismantle energy

*Essential nuclear programs will probably be disrupted if the DOE is relegated to the Commerce Department.*

**T**he proposal by the Reagan Administration to dismantle the Department of Energy is a monstrous mistake at this point in history. It is still possible, however, that Congress could block the move after it receives the detailed proposal later this month.

The proposal, as it stands, is to eliminate the cabinet-level energy agency and scatter certain parts to Interior and Commerce. Interior would regain its pre-Carter jurisdiction over the hydroelectric dams operated by governmental marketing bodies such as Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) and the national petroleum reserves. More significantly, Commerce Secretary Malcolm Baldrige is slated to get the vast part of the DOE, which would become a sub-unit of the Commerce bureaucracy responsible for basic energy research. Commerce will also take over the vast and vital DOE nuclear weapons program which administers our national research labs at Los Alamos, Sandia, Lawrence Livermore, and a complex of related production and monitoring facilities.

I call the new proposal a catastrophe, though I am well aware of many of the reasons motivating it, including Reagan's campaign pledge to abolish the Department of Energy because of its special character as a creation of the Carter-Schlesinger policy of using energy as a chokepoint to force industrial disintegration. A brief review

of recent history is relevant here.

The most significant energy-policy initiative in this century is the governmental mandate, concretized in the 1954 Atomic Power Act, to develop a civilian agency with the mandate to realize commercial nuclear power. The Atomic Energy Commission's mandate was explicitly this. The history of governmental "energy policy" over the past decade is in part the history of factional attempts to destroy this institutionalized mandate. Ironically, the first major step was taken by the Republican Nixon administration at the suggestion of his energy adviser, S. David Freeman of the Office of Science and Technology, along with Trilateral Commission energy strategist John C. Sawhill of the Aspen Institute, and such Trilateral towel-boys as Gerald Parsky, then an aide to Bill Simon.

Their proposal, which was adopted by a foolish Congress during the Ford administration, took the AEC and made it one of six "equal" departments of a new Energy Research and Development Administration (ERDA) in 1974. Within three years, RAND wrecker James Rodney Schlesinger, who had already undermined the AEC from within as Nixon's AEC Commissioner, was able to create the present Department of Energy. Especially under the Carter planners, nuclear policy was treated at best on a par with solar and "environment" issues.

At this point, the entire issue becomes clear. It would be simple to reorganize the Energy Department to restore the prominence of nuclear and advanced-energy R&D programs around breeder-reactor development, MHD generation, and high-temperature reactor development. To take the cabinet-level department and reduce its priority to a unit within Commerce could ensure the final destruction of this nation's nuclear program.

I recently spoke with someone who had served as an employee of the AEC, ERDA and DOE. Each change was tremendously disruptive, he stressed. Committed government scientists and public servants departed at each stage of the nuclear wind-down. Today, he predicts that if the dismantling succeeds, the most talented mid-level people will go into private industry, most never to return.

The call this month by White House Science Adviser George Keyworth to kill the Clinch River Breeder program adds chilling evidence of the danger of further burial of our nuclear program into any new agency, let alone Commerce.

A major fight on Capitol Hill is in the works. One thing buried so far from the public view, and perhaps from that of the President, is the fact that the \$6 billion U.S. nuclear weapons program will become an appendage of the \$2 billion Commerce Department. Many scientists in the nation's weapons programs fear relocation to a civilian agency without experience in nuclear weaponry. Critics accurately emphasize that since the 1974 dismantling of the AEC, our nuclear weapons program has been unable to fund modernization of its World War II facilities.