

Commentary

Pipeline delay national stupidity

By ERNEST CONINE

In a playful bit of muscle-flexing, four Arab nations briefly stopped pumping oil a few days ago to demonstrate their ability to shut off vitally needed energy supplies if the United States and other oil importing countries don't behave to suit them.

At about the same time, Sen. J. William Fulbright (D-Ark.) seriously suggested that a growing dependence on middle eastern oil may lead the United States or its "surrogates" to take over the Arab oil fields by military force.

With all this going on, the continuing delay in construction of the Trans-Alaska oil pipeline is incredible. More than that, it is a national stupidity for which Americans may pay dearly in the years ahead.

As practically everybody knows by now, this country no longer produces anywhere near enough petroleum to meet demand. We are already importing a third of our needs. If things continue on their present course, half or more of our oil supplies will be coming from foreign sources by 1980 — a staggering 4.4 billion barrels. Most of these imports will come from the politically volatile Middle East.

Leaving aside the very real political and national security considerations, the economic implications are staggering. Oil imports would constitute roughly a 16 billion dollar drain on the U.S. balance of payments. It is hard to see how deficits of that magnitude could be offset unless the government, at great expense to the taxpayers, pumped massive subsidies into

such export industries as aerospace and agriculture.

Enter Alaskan oil.

The largest oil discovery ever made on the North American continent was made five years ago on Alaska's north slope. Its proven reserves are estimated conservatively at about 10 billion barrels — 25 per cent of total U.S. domestic reserves. The actual figure may be eight or ten times that much.

In 1969 a group of oil companies sought a permit to build a pipeline to carry the oil 789 miles southward across Alaska to the Port of Valdez for tanker shipment to Los Angeles, San Francisco and Seattle.

Then came the environmentalists, protesting that the project would do irreparable damage to the permafrost, imperil wildlife and pose a danger of serious spills from oil tankers. If the north slope oil is to be tapped at all, they say, it should be transported via a pipeline across Canada to the Middle West.

The latest court ruling has made it clear that the Trans-Alaska pipeline cannot be built without an act of Congress — and even then more lawsuits by the environmentalists could delay construction indefinitely. That is where things stand.

No one should imagine, of course, that Alaskan oil will eliminate the need for oil imports. But as Interior Secretary Rogers C.B. Morton has pointed out, "Every barrel of oil we can deliver and produce domestically means one less barrel we must import."

Adds William Simon, deputy secretary of the treasury: "The

significance of our north slope energy potential," he told a Senate committee, "is not just the 2 million barrels per day that could someday be delivered through the Alaska pipeline. Nor is it the 10 billion-barrel proven reserves in the Prudhoe Bay field."

"Projections indicate that the north slope has potential reserves of as much as 80 billion barrels. Thus, we might someday achieve an Alaska production of 5 to 8 million barrels per day."

"This, in turn, could reduce our first-round balance-of-trade outflows by 7 billion to 12 billion dollars per year. Production at maximum rates would also materially strengthen our bargaining position with producing countries and increase our ability to meet any surplus disruptions with minimum adverse economic consequences. . . . But to obtain the north slope's full potential during the critical period of the 1980s, we must begin development now."

There is no question that environmental dangers are involved, nor is there any doubt that a good case can be made for a Trans-Canada pipeline carrying Alaskan oil into the American heartland. As arguments against going ahead with the Trans-Alaskan pipeline, however, they don't hold water.

If Alaskan oil doesn't come down to the U.S. West Coast, the area will have to depend all the more on foreign oil — oil that will move in tankers not subject to the special environmental safeguards decreed by the interior department for tankers

from Alaska. Double tanker bottoms, for example.

As for the alternative route across Canada, it would pose environmental hazards of its own.

Also, the longer that the Alaskan pipeline is postponed, the greater will be the pressure to open the spill-prone Santa Barbara channel to full-scale drilling. Then there is the question of jobs.

As Morton puts it, "Building the Alaska line would create 26,000 construction jobs, at peak, for American workers, plus 73,000 man-years of tanker construction, and 770 man-years of work for U.S. maritime crews and maintenance. These jobs would be lost if the pipeline goes through Canada, because the Canadian government has said it will give preference to Canadians."

Finally there is the time factor.

If legal obstacles to the Alaskan pipeline can be overcome by 1974, construction can be completed by 1977 or 1978 because the engineering has been done and the pipe is already on hand. The Canadian route would take an estimated five years longer — every year of which would represent a massive, unnecessary drain on the U.S. balance of payments.

The fact is that both pipelines are needed. The sensible thing is to go ahead, as Sen. Henry M. Jackson (D-Wash.) has suggested, with the Trans-Alaska pipeline while opening negotiations with the Canadians.

Ernest Conine is a columnist for the Los Angeles Times.

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Letters

Thieu

Your title to a Wednesday UPI Roundup, "Thieu warns about Commies" may carry a connotation of Thieu's credibility, but the article perpetuates the same old story. Why do educated people still carelessly refer to Thieu government actions and possessions as those of the South Vietnamese? This may seem a trivial literary point, but it is an expression of part of the basis for the war in Indochina.

South Vietnam is a part of Vietnam. Thieu's government, the Republic of Vietnam (which claims sovereignty over all of Vietnam in its Constitution, by the way), is one of two recognized government administrations in South Vietnam. The other is the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam. The Nixon administration may hope the PRG would disappear, but it's not these hopes you were reporting, was it?

Dennis Gilbert
grad student

Daycare

This is in response to Joseph Vidali's letter of June 21st on the subject of the ASUO Day Care controversy. On several occasions in recent months Vidali has submitted to a fairly common compulsion. He feels a need to write indignant (though admittedly coherent) letters in reaction to the slightest prospect that someone or some group might get Something For Nothing. However, in his last letter he seems to have abandoned the modicum of intelligence that has characterized his less recent outbursts, and appears to have moved forthrightly into the realm of stupidity. I say this because the funding of the ASUO Day Care facility makes eminently good sense even within the narrow confines of Mr. Vidali's economic world view.

Brezhnev says he simply cannot understand why any American legislator would want anything to stand in the way of improved relations with the Soviet Union in general, and improved commercial relations with the Soviet Union in particular. Specifically he argues against the Jackson Amendment, which would deny commercial advantages to the Soviet Union unless it repealed the emigration tax which it levies in particular against Jews who desire to emigrate to Israel.

In pursuit of this goal, Brezhnev invited top legislative leaders to lunch and talked to them for several hours. His approach was what one might call Russian Heavy. To Senator Frank Church he said, "I have seen pictures of you and I always knew I would like you when I met you." Senator Church did not wince, although no doubt it crossed his mind that the men Brezhnev has liked during his long public career have been those who have shown themselves professionally adept at tyranny, partners in the enterprise described by Henry Kamm of the New York Times a year or so back as "the greatest assault ever mounted upon the human spirit."

The term "improved" relations is one that puzzles, mostly because it has come to be used fetishistically. Beginning with the material order, what is it the Soviet Union has that we want? It is in moments of such stress as this that words like "bauxite" cross one's lips.

Okay, and what else? Gas — ten years from now. If we want gas that badly, why

not use some of our own, even at the risk of squirting a can of oil on some Alaskan tundra? Gold? We have gone out of the business of buying gold. Dollars, yes. But the Soviet Union has no dollars. The Soviet Union has to come to American corporations to borrow dollars.

If Brezhnev in a swoon of enthusiasm decided to elope with the United States, there is absolutely nothing material he could supply us with by way of dowry. Don't you understand, the Russians have nothing to buy things from us with. They have only American credit. All that they can do for us is prospective. What we can do for them is immediate. And the Communists want our help immediately because they are in a hell of a jam economically, and one is just cynical enough to suspect that if they were not in such an economic jam, Brezhnev would find the profile of Senator Church less alluring.

What can the Soviet Union give us of an extra-material kind? Well: cultural exchange. Have we not just finished signing a cultural exchange agreement? Yes, and it's the same old thing again. Better than nothing, but the equivalent of sending a packet of band-aids into Hiroshima. A few dozen graduate students, one or two exhibitions in nine Russian cities, maximum 28 days per city. The cultural agreement is phrased that "both countries" agree to so many students and "both countries" to so many exhibitions and "both countries" to so many art shows.

is less likely to contribute to those nasty, expensive social problems associated with lower incomes and poorer educations.)

So what you have here, Mr. Vidali, is an opportunity to make a wise investment, which will pay you substantial Dividends in the future. Not only will your share of that onerous middle-class tax burden be reduced later on, but you will help insure that the children of the people who get through school will have to rely less on the

Hell, we couldn't care less if the Soviet Union sent over 100,000 students, if every ballet dancer in Russia set out for America, if Pravda brought in a million copies a day of its Orwellian concentrate. The fact of the matter is: You can't buy a single American periodical in Moscow. The Voice of America and Radio Liberty beamed into Russia are still jammed, which is a deteriorated condition over that of 1968, which is when jamming was reimposed. Organic progress towards co-existence requires the free flow of information. Brezhnev has shown no interest whatever in this.

Finally we stand to gain from Russia freedom for the captive nations, which subject if it were raised in Brezhnev's presence would cause him to go home shaking his fist. And we have to gain genuine demilitarization. On this score, the Soviet Union skunked Richard Nixon in SALT I, reducing us to an inferior status and freezing Soviet superiority in certain fields. Thanks to yet another amendment by Jackson (what would we do without him?) the Senate is on record as opposed to any further polarization of strength in SALT II, concerning which Brezhnev has not been heard to say a public word. And, of course, to the extent we help him with our economic credits, we ease the strain on the Soviet Union's productive capacity for the manufacture of — arms.

"Grandmother, what big teeth you have!" Senator Church might have replied to Brezhnev.

honest efforts of hard working people like you.

Besides, Joe, in five or ten years when you zoom past those thriving Day Care Centers in your Chrysler station wagon, you'll experience that warm glow in your heart you get when you know you did the right thing with your money.

Skip Wall
Student

On the right

Trading with Brezhnev