

Atiyeh and Hallock: nuclear pro and con

by MIKE DOLAN
Of the Emerald

Editor's note: This is the second in a two-part series on nuclear power bill in the Legislature. Part one explained where the issue of nuclear power now stands in the Legislature. Part two will take a look at some of the people and the politics behind the issue.

SALEM — Someone once asked Sen. Pres. Jason Boe why he was referring nuclear power bills to two committees, first to Environment and Energy and then to Trade and Economic Development.

He said there were two parts to the nuclear question, first the issue of clean environment and second the need for jobs and economic growth.

What he did not say was that the first committee was chaired by Sen. Ted Hallock, a critic of nuclear power, and the second committee (the one with the final decision) was chaired by Sen. Victor Atiyeh, who feels nuclear power has an "interim" place in Oregon's energy picture.

The senators are just two of the people who will be shaping the nuclear power issue. Thanks to the introduction this month of the nuclear safety standards measure in the House, HB-2279, Ralph Nader has entered the debate too.

Nader and Californian Ed Koupal of People's Lobby are backing a drive to get an identical law passed in seven western states requiring nuclear power plants to meet more stringent safety regulations. It requires plant operators to test their accident back-up systems, to have full insurance coverage and to make sure they can dispose of all wastes.

If the plants do not meet the insurance requirement, they must operate at half capacity. If they do not meet the safety standards, they must scale down their operation ten per cent each year until they stop.

HB-2279 slipped by the House Environment and Energy Commission with a narrow 4-3 vote. It has to pass through the Joint Trade and Economic Development Committee before it reaches the full House.

But before the introduction of that bill, two of Hallock's nuclear bills were sent to the joint trade committee. They were SB-120 and SB-127 which refer a five-

year moratorium to a vote of the people. They have been sitting in committee for nearly two months.

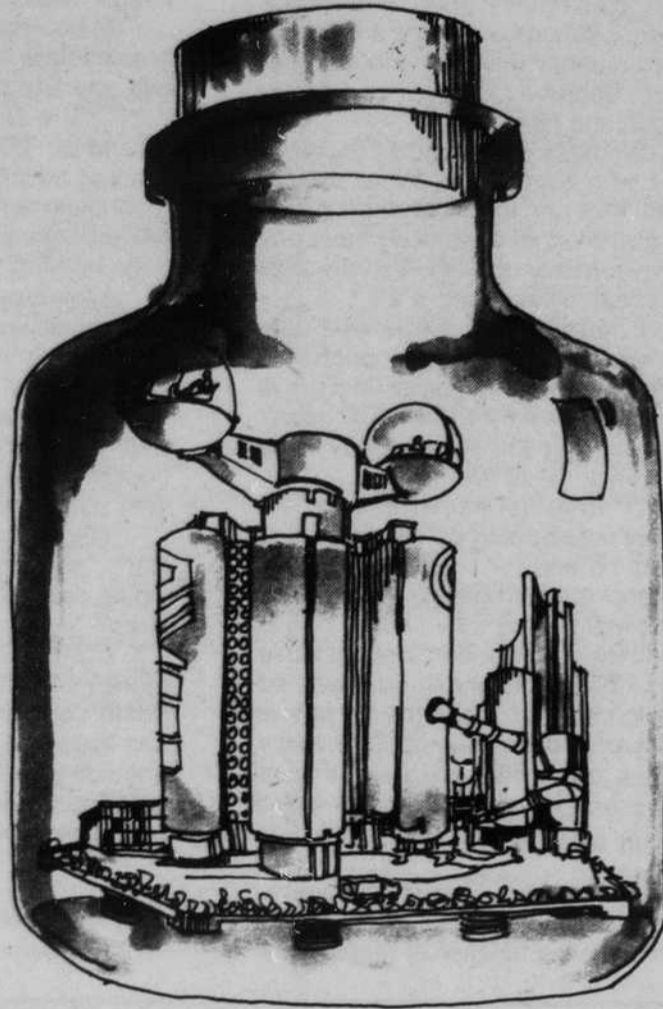
They remained there because chairer Atiyeh was waiting for Hallock's third nuclear bill, SB-121. The third bill—unlike the others—institutes a moratorium without a vote. But Hallock wanted to know the fate of his first two bills before sending over the third.

Conversely, Atiyeh has been waiting for Hallock to schedule a hearing on one of his bills (Atiyeh's) in the Energy and Environment Committee. The bill, SB-346, is important to Atiyeh because it pulls the reins on one government agency he has never liked very much, the Land Conservation and Development Commission (LCDC). The LCDC was created in 1973 to oversee local land development throughout the state. Atiyeh opposes LCDC because he feels it interferes with local control. SB-346 makes the LCDC submit its goals to the Legislature for final approval.

Hallock has let the bill rest in his committee.

But now Trade and Economic Development has scheduled

hearings on two of Hallock's bills and HB-2279 for later this month. Nuclear opponents are now gearing up for hearings.



Drawing by Alfred Li

They have two things going for them—they are trying to stop unsafe plants—not all plants—and the first two Hallock bills are based on democracy—they let the final decision rest with the voters. The bills may get a boost from the big name of Ralph Nader, depending upon how much he wants to meddle in Oregon politics. The prospect is slim, but Nader has criticized nuclear power more than any other issue and he may want to enter state politics when the issue is identical in seven states.

Nuclear proponents, however, have the advantage of better positioning on the issue, Atiyeh controls the bills, and, if the legislation reaches a stalemate, the present situation, in which the plants are unchecked, continues.

The opponents, composed of small dedicated groups from throughout the state including Eugene, Corvallis, Lebanon and eastern Oregon, are dedicated almost exclusively to these bills and they will work hard convincing legislators face-to-face.

The industry, on the other hand, is not worried. Doug Heider, Portland General Electric (PGE) lobbyist, has not talked to anybody about HB-2279 and he does not expect it to go anywhere in the House. Nor has he bothered to study the bill, he is occupied with other legislation.

HB-2279, as far as getting through the legislature, has a couple of weaknesses. It does not lay down specific safety standards, it relies on the state Legislature to decide "reasonable" safety standards. The bill provides that a one-third

vote can stop a nuclear power plant. Many people will object to the direct intervention of the lawmakers, but the one-third number leaves room for compromise—maybe intentionally so.

Another problem in many legislators' minds is the idea of legislative review. Rep. Cleatis Mitchell, D-Ashland, one of three representatives who voted against the measure in the Environment and Energy Committee, says the Legislature is not qualified to pass judgment on the technology of nuclear power plants.

And, unlike earlier nuclear moratorium bills, HB-2279 does not stop the construction of the plants—directly. But the effect is the same and nobody is being fooled. The bill's supporters had hoped nobody would figure it out.

The seven-state drive of which HB-2279 is a part is young and still weak, but it has national importance in two respects. People's Lobby is dedicated to the initiative petition. Director Ed Koupal and organizer John Forester hope to make the process popular again and subsequently provide voters with a lever to use against entrenched political power. Their eventual goal is to get the initiative petition in the United States Constitution.

The more narrow effect of the drive is to challenge the federal Energy Research and Development Administration, (ERDA), successor of the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC). ERDA hopes to test, transport, store and throw away nuclear wastes in the west.

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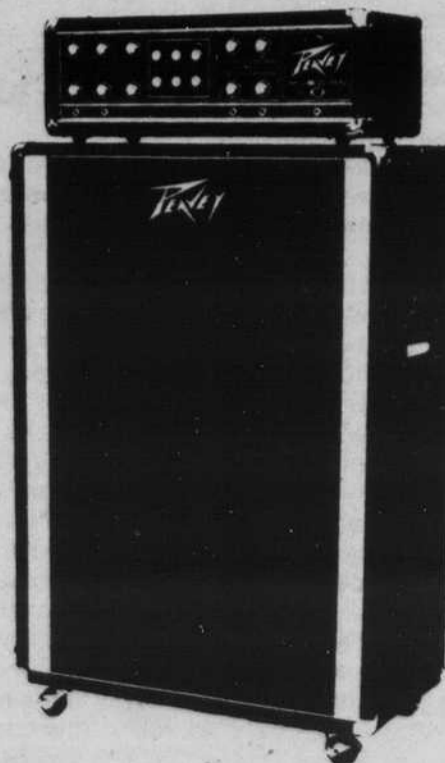
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