

# To cover nuclear costs Weaver predicts electric rate hike

By GREG WASSON  
Of the Emerald

Salem — Fourth district representative Jim Weaver brought alarming news to the Oregon House Tuesday: Northwest electric rates can be expected to increase 150-200 percent soon.

According to Weaver, the jump is the direct result of nuclear construction. He pointed to five nuclear plants being built in Washington.

"The five plants have escalated in price by as much as 300 percent. Officials now project that these plants will cost 10.4 billion."

Weaver, who heads the Water and Power Subcommittee of the House Interior Committee, charged that the plants are being under-written by the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA).

"In other words, the rate-payers being served by the Bonneville System are paying for those plants."

Weaver then compared the debt caused by the construction to the existing national debt.

"The horrendous, staggering national debt we all fear so much is equaled in the Northwest on a per capita basis by the debts being incurred to pay for these plants. And this decision was made by a handful of people without any public input of any kind."

Weaver hit repeatedly on the lack of public input in present policy.

"Today we have a few federal officials and a handful of utility executives making our energy policy for us."

Weaver said instituting rates that would make those who use

more, pay more would democratize energy policy.

"What we are doing now in the utilities is unsound business. It's making decisions without allowing the people to vote with their dollars."

Presently, BPA rates are set by melding inexpensive hydroelectric power with the more expensive nuclear. According to Weaver, "this sends false signals to the people."

Weaver said that people in the Northwest use electricity at three times the national average.

Weaver also touched on a bill to create public financing of Congressional campaigns.

"The proliferation of the TAC, the political action committee, will pour countless millions of dollars of special interest money into our campaign. We must limit the spending and halt this rapid onslaught on our free election system."

Weaver said public financing is the only way to keep elections honest.

"The bill is HR 1, to give you an idea of the emphasis the leadership has on it."



Jim Weaver

Photo by Suzanne Aigen

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## Lobbyists

has introduced legislation (SB 403) to reduce the number of Portland members on the Wildlife Commission, and terminate all current appointments at the end of this year. Environmental groups are not happy with the idea.

The commission has made many recommendations regarding wildlife habitat, land-use planning, Board of Forestry regulations and RARE II that conservationists support, although the board has no legal authority.

"This is an attempt to gut the commission," says Jim Stratton, University Survival Center director. "It's a blatant attack. The commission is doing a good job, and now they want to restrict its management to state-owned lands, and let Vic (Gov. Atiyeh) appoint all seven next Jan. 1."

The Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee will

address the bill Friday at 8 a.m. in Hearing Room A in the Capitol.

The OEC is watching progress on a bill authorizing state purchase of Yaquina Head. Introduced simultaneously by Sen. Dell Isham, D-Lincoln City, as SB 420, and by Rep. Max Rijken, D-Newport, as HB 2346, the legislation would appropriate funds for an assessment of the property.

Local residents prompted the action to save the promontory further harm from gravel mining. The bill had its first hearing Monday and is proceeding unhampered over the legislative hurdles.

Another bill that seems to have a bright future is SB 299, which would include a provision for solar easement rights within the land-use planning and zoning process.

"It's moving pretty well," Buel

says. "It received a favorable hearing before the Senate Local Government Committee and came out with a do-pass recommendation. It has now been referred to the Senate Environment and Energy Committee."

Buel says the OEC intends to watch legislation coming out of the Trade and Economic Committees. "They manage to put economics over anything else."

Environmental groups are perhaps more than usually wary of this legislative session, if only because of the unequal pace of business.

"We have to watch almost everything," Buel says. "A lot of things have come up all of a sudden that we have to keep a close eye on."

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