



THE PUBLIC REPORT



RESPECT FOR A RESOURCE

by Congressman Les AuCoin

When the Reagan Administration announced last month that it wants to wash its hands entirely on any further help to Oregon's fisheries, shock waves shook the coast from Astoria to Brookings.

Everyone along the coast, everyone who knows first-hand the true benefits of resource management and development, everyone who knows what it takes to keep jobs and wring a profit from the sea, knew that the news could not have been worse:

— A cut of seven million dollars from the Columbia River hatcheries program next year, forcing nineteen of the twenty-four hatcheries to close, followed by the complete termination of federal support the year after.

— Termination of the Saltonstall-Kennedy fund, which assists our fishing industry in the development of new products, new fishing and processing techniques, and promotes sales of U.S. fish products at home and overseas. Since S-K programs involve no tax dollars and are paid for entirely from fees on foreign fleets operating in U.S. waters, this cut was simply beyond comprehension.

— Termination of anadromous fish conservation programs, commercial fisheries research and development, Northwest salmon and steelhead enhancement, the fisheries loan fund, the gear damage reimbursement fund, and, for good measure, Sea Grant.

The words of a commercial fisherman in Astoria conveyed the distress of all coastal Oregonians: "It is very hard for me to comprehend the logic behind this proposed action," he wrote to me. "The salmon hatcheries cannot be refused aid, especially in these depressed times. The federal government must realize its

responsibility for the decline of the Columbia River salmon... An entire region and its people demand the respect their resources deserve."

Another fisherman put it more tersely: "If the hatcheries go, it's all over. The bankers can run the boats."

It is very clear what is happening here. A month after writing off responsibility for preserving or enhancing our fisheries resources, the Reagan Administration called upon the nation's scientists to join in an all-out effort to put Star Wars weapons into space. At what cost, and at what sacrifice to jobs-producing investments the government could otherwise be making, you and I can only guess.

What we do know, however, is that the seven million dollars cut in the Columbia River hatcheries, which sustain thousands of Oregon jobs, represents the cost of a single cruise missile. To the White House, seven million dollars spent on fish is excessive; spent on yet another missile it is not questioned.

What makes the Administration's assault on fisheries programs all the more astonishing is that this is not the first time it has been tried. Two years ago, when the same hit list was sent to Congress in the President's budget, I launched a coordinated effort with Representatives from throughout our region to stop it.

We wrote letters to David Stockman, the President's budget director, explaining that the Columbia River hatcheries supply fully half of the one hundred million dollars worth of salmon the commercial industry caught off the Oregon and Washington coast. We pointed out that the hatcheries pay dividends to the U.S. Treasury, in terms of tax revenues from fish harvests,



We spelled out that the hatcheries exist not as a gift from the government but because of a federal obligation to offset the decimation to Columbia salmon runs caused by the construction of federal dams.

We explained how Sea Grant researchers at Oregon State University have added millions of dollars annually to the West Coast seafood processing industry by developing ways to increase the yield of Pacific shrimp.

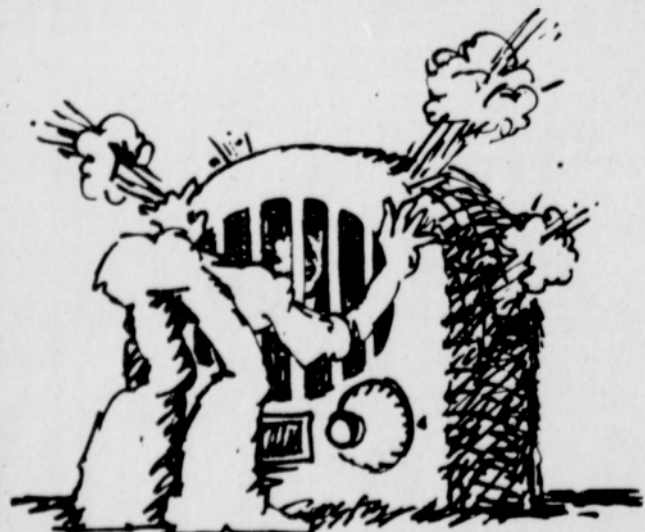
We testified before the Congressional subcommittees that hold the purse strings of the critical importance of fisheries programs to our region, and of the enormous economic damage that would be done if the were "zeroed out." In the end, to the great relief of everyone concerned, we prevailed. Congress rejected the cuts, and the President went along.

Unbelievably, the budget submitted by the President this year for fisheries resources reads no differently than it did two years ago.

Is the Administration deaf and blind? Some say budget drafters are cutting funds and eliminating programs as a way of "getting the red numbers down" so the deficit run up by an unrestrained military weapons buildup won't be even higher. I think they are probably right.

I am going to fight it again with all the force I can muster as a member of the Appropriations Committee. This Administration means what it says and will do what it says unless it is stopped. That is why I am gearing up for another fight, and why I am determined to win it.

Les AuCoin is the Democratic Representative of Oregon's First Congressional District.



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