

Energy may surpass taxes in legislative priority

Salem Scene

By Jack Zimmerman

The name of the legislative game in Salem this year is supposed to be taxes—specifically relief from property taxes.

But on the basis of news emanating from the Capitol, there may be another name for this session of the Oregon Legislature. That name may be energy—epitomized by Trojan—the \$460 million nuclear power plant 42 miles north of Portland on the banks of the Columbia River.

While members of the House Revenue Committee spent the first two months of this session agonizing over a tax relief package, the Senate grabbed headlines by refusing to confirm Gov. Victor Atiyeh's appointment of a temporary Energy Department director.

The Governor's candidate, according to prevailing Senators, was too philosophically in tune with utilizing nuclear fission to generate electrical energy. Trojan was in the spotlight.

The Governor proposed a candidate to serve on the Energy Facility Siting Council—the body that grants certificates to permit construction of energy producing facilities. It was revealed that candidate and his wife owned stock in Portland General Electric Company, principal owner-developer of Trojan. The glare of publicity again focused on the electrical generating plant with a capacity greater than two Bonneville Dams.

Even before the session began, Trojan became a household word when a control room design error forced its closure for nearly nine months while the flaw was corrected to meet earthquake resistance standards.

These events served to intensify earlier Trojan illumination during two attempts by anti-nuclear protestors to occupy the plant, electrical rate hearings before the Public Utility Commissioner and the necessity to increase storage of spent fuel rods at the generating facility site. And if those weren't enough, PGE also was involved in problems relating to starting construction of another Trojan type generator near Arlington.

In retrospect, events in the recent past and controversies over gubernatorial appointments merely served as curtain-raisers for subsequent legislative developments that are bound to keep Trojan on stage as long as the 60th Assembly continues to meet.

Anti-nuclear forces—stymied in attempts to forcibly achieve a shutdown of Trojan through occupation of the plant—have launched a determined effort to legislate the facility out of business.

A spate of bills introduced in both houses would not only close Trojan but prevent construction of other nuclear generating facilities.

The Trojan shutdown effort in Salem even includes elements of overkill. For instance, one bill would prohibit storage of spent fuel at nuclear plants while another would effectively prohibit its transportation to off-site storage areas.

There is a bill requiring owners of nuclear generators to provide front money for eventual decommissioning. Another would require adequate disposal of high-level radioactive waste prior to site certification—a responsibility already assumed by the federal government.

Another proposal deals with site security following decommissioning and yet another would require bonding to indemnify the state from liability for events occurring during construction, operation and dismantling of nuclear plants.

The immediate foregoing—along with still another requiring counties within 50 air miles of a nuclear plant to prepare and implement

evacuation plans—appear to be scare tactics designed

solely to create fear and distrust of nuclear generators among the public at large.

Meanwhile, Trojan since January has set a record for continuous operation. All by itself, Trojan kept thousands of customers from severe discomfort during this year's record cold spell. And the

largest single generator of energy in Oregon consistently continues to attract an average of more than 12,000 curious and fearless visitors monthly to its on-site information center.

Closing Trojan would only increase Oregon's dependence on foreign and out-of-state

energy sources. The ability of those sources to provide energy for Oregonians depends on factors as common as local demand and as complicated as international intrigue.

And while anti-nuclear forces assail lawmakers with plans to shut down Trojan and

prevent construction of more nuclear generators, still another group has descended on the Capitol demanding fixed rates for residential users made possible by higher rates for commerce and industry.

Pity the poor lawmaker who recognizes Trojan's energy is cheaper and more reliable

than energy purchased from outsiders.

If he votes to close Trojan, the cost of juice goes up while folks are clamoring for lower utility bills. And if he grants reduced rates for some, others must rise. And if commercial and industrial users are forced to subsidize residential

users, those additional costs are passed on to consumers of other goods and services or businesses close and jobs disappear.

Energy may well be a better name for the game in Salem this session. Because without it there really won't be much to tax.

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