

Durno Opposed to Reclamation Job In Baker Vicinity

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Washington (Special)
Rep. Edwin R. Durno, doing what a congressman almost never does, has come out against a new reclamation project for his state—the upper division of the Baker irrigation works, north of Baker in eastern Oregon.

The Medford Republican and eight other GOP members of the House Interior Committee have filed a vigorous dissent from the committee's majority endorsement of a bill sponsored by Rep. Al Ullman, Baker Democrat.

The bill authorizes \$6,168,000 in federal funds for development of the project, which includes the Mason dam on the Powder River 18 miles from Baker, plus a replacement for the existing Lilley pumping plant and a relief pumping plant. The Bureau of Reclamation has allocated the total cost of the project as follows: for irrigation, \$4,354,600; flood control, \$1,056,400; fish and wildlife conservation, \$632,000; and recreation, \$125,000. The cost al-

located to irrigation would be repaid to the government without interest, and the other costs are non-reimbursable.

The project is designed to supply full irrigation water supply to 4010 acres of presently dry lands and a supplemental water supply to 13,900 acres.

Grounds for Attack
Congressman Durno and his colleagues have attacked the bill on these grounds:

1. The project is not economically justified under any proper method of analysis; 2. Proper repayment is not assured; 3. The 160-acre limitation would be breached; 4. It has dubious flood control benefits; 5. Half the lands are poor; 6. Over half the lands are owned by relatively few persons; 7. The bill requires an unjustified power subsidy from Bonneville Power Administration; 8. Crop surpluses make reclamation of marginal lands unjustified.

The objections to a subsidy refer to the provision whereby the local water users would repay \$1,127,500 of the project's cost, over a 50-year period after the initial 10-year development period, and Bonneville would pick up the tab for the remaining \$3,227,100 allocated to irrigation.

The dissenting lawmakers noted that Bonneville is

currently running an annual deficit of about \$15 million and said: "It is fully evident that there are no Bonneville power revenues now available to subsidize the Baker project payout. To authorize such use of Bonneville power revenues would be a farce unless the bill also provided for a proper increase in Bonneville rates to assure current repayment of the Baker project costs and of the cost of all other federal projects that are to be repaid by the use of power revenues in the Bonneville area."

Trial Balloon

Conceding that the Baker project costs are relatively small, the dissent stated: "There can be no question, however, that this is just a trial balloon or precedent for authorizing larger and larger uneconomical reclamation projects outside the present

Bonneville power marketing area, with major repayment to be charged up to nonexistent surplus power revenues of Bonneville. We must emphatically oppose any such proposal."

Durno and the other objectors cited the long-standing limit of 160-acres in a single ownership, if the government delivers water, and pointed out that this bill affords an exception by authorizing deliveries to up to 320 acres if the land has been classified as poorer class 3 and class 4 lands.

They noted that 6 persons

own 6,130 acres, or 35 percent of the project lands, and that "by the expediency of the transfer of a 320-acre block to each of four members of a family, it appears no excess land would have to be disposed of on this project."

While it might be true that the proposed increase in acreage under one ownership would be limited to the poorer class 3 and class 4 lands, this proposed method of breaching the 160-acre limitation could easily result in questionable or deliberately dishonest land classification whereby an actual circumven-

tion of the 160-acre limitation could be achieved even on class 1 or class 2 lands," the minority stated.

Benefits Boosted

In early Interior Department reports on the proposed Baker upper division, the Fish and Wildlife conservation benefits were estimated first in 1931 as \$2200 annually. In 1958 it was boosted to \$5,400, and in 1960 to \$17,700 annually. The minority charged that the "it appears to be a collusive effort by two related agencies to juggle conjectural figures in an attempt to achieve a favorable economic answer." They said the allocation of \$632,000 as a non-reimbursable cost for fish and wildlife over the 50-year per-

iod is "totally unrealistic and unjustified in the record. The recommendation that Congress ask the taxpayers of the nation to pick up the check for this amount is an affront to our intelligence."

The Baker bill has been considered in a hearing by the Senate Interior Committee but not voted on yet. Its Senate sponsors are Oregon Sens. Wayne Morse and Maurine B. Neuberger.

Dennis the Menace



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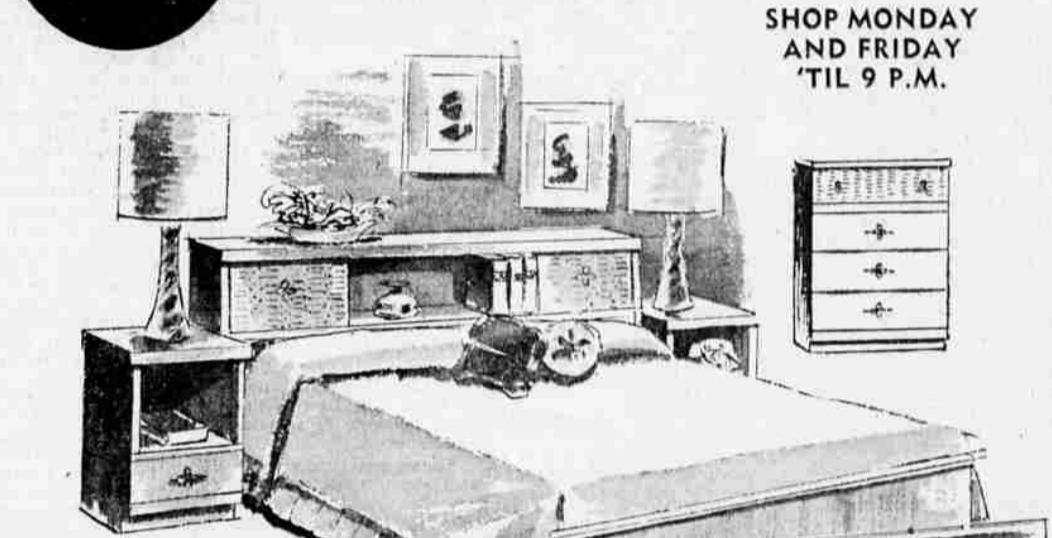
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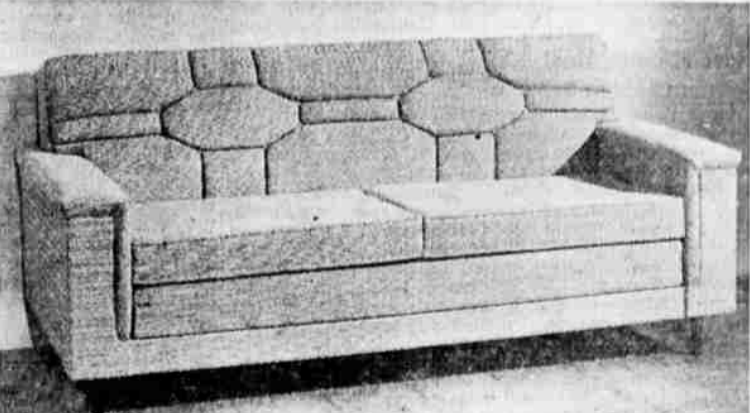
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