

Nuke moratorium question divides congressmen

A O&E Roundup

Congressmen representing western Wayne and southern Oakland counties split last week as the U.S. House of Representatives rejected a proposed moratorium on construction of nuclear reactors.

The proposed six months construction freeze lost 254-135. Supporting the moratorium were Reps. Carl Pursell, R-Plymouth, William Brodhead, D-Detroit, and David Bonior, D-Mi. Clemens. Pursell's 2nd

District includes Livonia. Brodhead's 17th District includes Redford, Farmington and Southfield. Bonior's 12th District includes the east side of Greater Rochester.

Opposed were Reps. William Broomfield, R-Birmingham, and William Ford, D-Taylor. Ford's 16th District includes Westland, Garden City and Canton.

Rep. James Blanchard, D-Pleasant Ridge, whose district includes Troy, did not vote.

THE PROPOSAL, an amendment to a \$374 million budget authorization for the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), was the first House vote regarding the safety of nuclear power since the Three Mile Island accident in Pennsylvania last March.

Both Brodhead and Pursell said they supported the freeze to send the NRC a message to increase health and safety monitoring of nuclear plants.

"I thought we ought to send them a message that the Congress feels they ought to clean up their act," Brodhead said.

"Health and safety issues have not been, historically, a major concern of

the Nuclear Regulatory Commission," Pursell said.

The NRC "ought to come down real hard" on existing nuclear plants, Pursell added. Nuclear plants provide about 13 percent of the country's electricity.

A SPOKESMAN for Broomfield said the congressman "was not prepared to close down a nuclear option completely . . . and that's the way the amendment would have been interpreted."

Brodhead noted that few licenses for nuclear reactors have been approved in recent years because plant construction costs are "astronomical."

"For the time being, it (nuclear power) is not economically feasible," Brodhead said, "and that's the main reason they're not being built."

The NRC now reviews every nuclear license request on a case by case basis. Each license takes up to three years to gain approval, Pursell said.

WHILE MAJORITIES in the House and Senate support more nuclear power development, Brodhead and Pursell remain cautious.

"I don't think we can turn back the clock on nuclear power," Brodhead said, "but it's foolish to go ahead until we solve the waste disposal problem and have adequate assurance on safety."

"I have very mixed opinions (on nuclear) generally," Pursell said, who has pushed for more research and development money for laser fusion as a major energy source.

For Pursell, the bottom line is to "get off the oil kick. If we're capable of making a commitment to go to the moon, we can make a commitment to develop new energy sources."

Broomfield's spokesman, Ken Nakamura, said the western Oakland congressman considers nuclear "an important element in the total energy response . . . but questions what to do with the (radioactive) waste."

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