

Nuclear power 'benign'

By Tim Richard
staff writer

The global warming trend may help nuclear power regain its lost popularity, said the president of Consumers Power Co.

In Fred Buckman's view, the reason is that coal, oil and other fossil fuels give off gases that result in warming the earth.

"Nuclear power looks very benign in a global warming context," said Buckman, the utility's chief operating officer since March of 1988. He once headed nuclear operations and has a doctorate in nuclear engineering from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

The company serves most of Oakland and northwestern Wayne County with natural gas. Outstate it sells both gas and electricity.

"WE'VE SEEN just the tip of the iceberg on the global warming trend," said Buckman in an interview.

"The summer of 1988 was hot. The summer of '87 was also hot. But if one looks at the temperature data over 70 or 80 years, the picture is a lot more confusing.

"One thing is clear: We as a people are doing more things that make it possible for large amounts of carbon dioxide, methane and chlorofluorocarbons to get into the atmosphere.

"They act as a greenhouse — they allow the sun's rays in but don't allow the equivalent radiation out. Now if the increased amount of gases do cause this to happen, it will have a significant impact on where we grow crops,

where we live. . . .
"I think we're faced with a major national decision process as to what kind of globe we will leave the next generation."

TODAY NUCLEAR power lacks the clear cost advantage of fossil fuels that it had after the Arab oil crisis of the mid-1970s, he said.

But in the 5-10-year time frame, American power companies may find they must burn less fossil fuel and look again at nuclear power.

"As a nation, we're not ready to build the next nuclear plant," Buckman said. In time, however, nuclear power will be seen as "not only acceptable but the right thing."

Currently Consumers Power generates electricity from 60 percent coal, 20 percent nuclear power and 20 percent from other fuels and hydro.

THE JACKSON-BASED utility last week announced it has a leadership position in the Global Climate Coalition, a national organization of trade associations and businesses conducting research on the greenhouse effect and its impact on American life.

The 43-year-old Kalamazoo native started with Consumers Power as a college intern in 1967, rose through the ranks, left in 1983, then returned in 1986 as a vice president overseeing the Palisades and Big Rock Point nuclear plants.

The utility gained notoriety for a failed \$4 billion investment in a Midland nuclear plant that almost bankrupted it.

In a wide-ranging interview,

Buckman talked about the future of the Michigan and suburban economy. Items:

• Economic growth won't exceed 2 percent annually in the next few years. "In our service area, growth in the number of gas customers will be offset by more efficient use" after a fairly robust growth period in 1982-88. But there will be no recession.

• The automotive market will be "stagnant to slightly declining." A shift from heavy manufacturing to service-oriented industry will continue.

• As the U.S. exports more, "rust belt" states such as Michigan will reverse their population losses. Oakland County and the metropolitan suburbs stretching out to Brighton, Howell and Chelsea will see continued growth. On the west side of the state, good spots will be the Grand Rapids area, Muskegon, Holland, Kalamazoo and Battle Creek.

• Consumers Power's own employment has been scaled down from 12,500 in 1984 to about 9,500 currently. But it still hires 20 to 25 summer interns, mostly engineering students, and also will need finance and accounting people in the years ahead.

• The kind of people it will hire in the years ahead will need to be more entrepreneurial than in the past because the utility will be less regulated and more market-driven. "There is a great chance to be part of designing the utility of 1995 or 2000 . . . I left in 1983 and came back in 1986. It was the right thing to do. There is an opportunity to help shape what we're going to do."

David Eisenhower Ike's grandson offers perspective

By Pat Murphy
staff writer

As the grandson of the 33rd president of the United States, David Eisenhower has a unique perspective of history.

He remembers, for example, French leader Charles DeGaulle coming to the Gettysburg farm of his grandfather, Dwight D. Eisenhower.

"I remember him getting out of a long black limousine," Eisenhower said Wednesday at the opening meeting of the 1989-90 Pontiac-Oakland Town Hall series. "I saw Churchill (Winston), Monty (British Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery)" and many others.

The perspective he learned at the knee of his grandfather expanded considerably when he married Julie Nixon, daughter of Pat and Richard M. Nixon, shortly before his first inauguration in 1968.

Like most presidents, "Richard Nixon was elected to fulfill a mission," Eisenhower said. "And he was tremendously successful (in his first term) by any measure."

"BUT RICHARD Nixon's success (in the first term) didn't mean success once that mission was accomplished," he said.

Eisenhower, now a lecturer in political science at the University of Pennsylvania, blended the lessons he learned in both roles — grandson of Ike and son-in-law of Nixon — in his two hour conversation that included

a question and answer session.

He said he became something of an expert on his grandfather after he started to write a short biography about him. "The more I got into it, the more I was drawn into the war years," he said.

The result was the first volume of "Eisenhower: At War," the first of a trilogy on Ike's life and times.

Eisenhower said he started the book just to shed whatever light he could about his grandfather from his intimate view. He said he is pleased that his work has received good reviews like the one in The New York Times that referred to his book as "a contribution toward historical understanding."

WHILE HIS TALK was interesting, perhaps more enlightening were his answers to questions from the 500, or so, who attended the meeting.

Question: Does your father-in-law want to make a political comeback?
Answer: "Does the sun rise in the east?" Actually, he's making that comeback by devoting time and energy as an unofficial elder statesman analyzing problems facing the nation and the world, Eisenhower said.

Question: What's in the future for the Democrats?

Answer: Any administration is as good or bad as it handles the issues confronting the nation, he said. The seeds of a Democratic comeback may lie in how well Republicans handle issues like foreign investment in the United States and how the United States handles relations with Mexico.

Question: Please comment on "the affair" rumor.
Answer: "I think it's more than a rumor," Eisenhower said. "She (Kay Summersby — his former driver in Europe) wrote a book about her alleged love affair with my granddad."

"BUT I DON'T believe it was true," Eisenhower said. "I know he (Ike) admired her and respected her contribution. But I really think it was an affair that never happened. I think she wished it had happened."

Question: Any politics in your future?
Answer: "I've thought about it, but the timing was never right," he said. "But you haven't heard the last of the name Eisenhower. Remember Alex," a reference to his 9-year-old son.

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