

REMARKS by Oregon Congressman LES AuCOIN

(On Weaver amendment to require evacuation plans to be filed with Nuclear Regulatory Commission before licenses can be granted for nuclear plants.)

Floor of the U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C.
June 18, 1979

Mr. AuCOIN. Mr. Chairman, I move to strike the requisite number of words. I rise in support of the amendment.

(Mr. AuCOIN asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. AuCOIN. Mr. Chairman, I would like to compliment my colleague, the gentleman from Oregon, for the concern the gentleman has shown in offering this amendment because I think the gentleman has shown he can care about this issue, even though he has no plants of his own in his district.

In my own congressional district in Oregon this issue is not an abstraction in any sense of the word. This issue is not a parlor game. This issue is not something that we talk about in idle conversation. It is not a theoretical concern.

My district is the only district in Oregon with a nuclear generating plant. It happens to be the largest generating plant in the country. Shortly after the Three Mile Island incident, I took the time to investigate the emergency plan in the county in which this plant is located. Through no fault of any kind on the part of local officials in this rural county, I discovered that the plan was hardly worth its name. There are on paper in Columbia County plans for evacuating people within a two-and-a-half mile radius of the plant in the event of a major accident; but the interesting thing is in my investigations throughout the length and breadth of Columbia County, I found that hardly anyone knows of the existence of such a plan.

I dare say if an emergency should strike, the people of Columbia County would not know what to do.

Someone said that the intention of the author of this amendment is to bring the entire nuclear program to a standstill. Do my colleagues really mean to say that the requirement of an evacuation plan would bring this vaunted industry, this vaunted program with such vaunted safety to a standstill? I do not think that is what the opponents of this amendment are really trying to say.

Someone else said that we are all supportive of safe power, but we do not need "obstructions" of this kind.

I ask my colleagues, How do we get safe power if we do not provide a minimal degree of safety in the implementation of these plants?

And further, is safety an "obstruction"? Is it an obstruction to simply require a minimal amount of protection and planning for the evacuation of men, women and children, in case of a major catastrophe or the possibility of one?

Mr. WYDLER. Mr. Chairman, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. AuCOIN. I will try to yield in a moment, as soon as I am done with my statement.

Furthermore, does it really make sense to anyone in this body, does it really make sense to anyone in this body that the NRC on the one hand requires that there be an emergency plan on site, but that there is no requirement that the area around the plants, around the site, be covered by a plan?

I would suggest that the danger to the residents in the immediate area of such a plant is at least as great as those on site and those people deserve the kind of protection that the gentleman provides in his amendment.

This amendment would insure that there is such a plan. It strikes me as a minimal first crucial step to providing the kind of safety we ought to exercise as representatives of this body in preparing for a danger that we may meet again, because there may, indeed, be future Three Mile Islands.

It should be pointed out that of the 28 states which have operating nuclear plants within their borders, only a dozen have emergency plans that are approved today by the NRC. Only a dozen.

My friend, the gentleman from Connecticut, indicates how strong some of those dozen actually are.

I think that ought to be kept in mind as my colleagues consider the amendment by my colleague, the gentleman from the State of Oregon.

Mr. WYDLER. Mr. Chairman, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. AuCOIN. I will yield in a moment. I want to complete my statement.

Mr. Chairman, it just seems to me that the bottom line is this, my friends: To continue the licensing of these plants before an approved emergency evacuation plan is in place is to sit on our hands in the face of real potential for human danger, human tragedy and human disaster involving people that you and I represent.

I urge my colleagues to support this amendment, not because it is chic, not because it happens to make for interesting conversation.

The CHAIRMAN. The time of the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. AuCOIN) has expired.

(By unanimous consent, Mr. AuCOIN was allowed to proceed for one additional minute.)

Mr. AuCOIN. I urge you to support the amendment not because it happens to make for interesting conversation in fashionable college towns, not because it makes abstract sense in elite liberal parlors of this country, but fundamentally because working men and women and children need the protection provided by this amendment.

I urge your support.