

HR14439/S3637: NATIONAL MATERIALS POLICY BILLS

by Philip Yeager, Counsel
Committee on Science and Technology,
U.S. House of Representatives

The commentary which you heard earlier from Mr. Teague and Senator Moss suggests a main key to the very genuine interest of the legislative branch in this conference.

I think it is important to reiterate that Congress—or at least a number of entities within it—are most anxious to have the results and findings of your various task groups. At a minimum, there are three or four Committees in each House of Congress, plus the Office of Technology Assessment, and the Congressional Research Service included in this group.

I believe it is important to bear in mind that, as a whole, we in the Congress are relatively unsophisticated with regard to the matters you will be discussing. We will, therefore, find it very useful if we can have described for us (1) the major materials issues as you see them and (2) what you believe are the various options for their solutions. We understand that individuals and groups alike are often hesitant to suggest solutions, but it seems to us that we have reached a point where it is time to start answering some questions as well as posing them.

Certain things are making an impression on current congressional thinking. As we look at employment problems, for example, we are beginning to realize that the traditional American stance of being short on labor and long on materials has now reversed itself. This is going to require drastic realignment in our thinking and our policy.

I think many of us, whether or not we will admit it publicly, are beginning to understand that we are not likely to make such a transition without somebody getting hurt.

This transition is what the Symington-Mosher bill and the Moss bill are designed to facilitate—that is, put the thinking process in motion. As you have already heard, the authors of these bills do not offer them as a basis for immediate legislative consideration, but we believe they will serve their catalyst purpose in this Congress and the next. I would like to quote from a recent letter received from Dr. Frederick Seitz, President of Rockefeller University:

While our national energy situation has its precarious aspects, the fact remains that we have enormous reserves of coal and fairly complete knowledge of how to use uranium and related materials in fission reactors. In contrast, many of

our most useful materials are available only abroad or are not available within our own borders on an economic basis. As a result I believe that our Nation has need of a materials policy. I am delighted that Mr. Symington is joining Mr. Mosher in taking a substantial initiative in this matter.

In conclusion, we hope that you will be blunt about whatever determinations you reach, that you will lay them on the line and that you will duck nothing. Most important, we are confident that your findings will not be on the basis of what you think people want to hear— for whatever reason, political, economic, or otherwise. That element, of course, is always difficult to avoid, but it is one which we now know that our people and our Government cannot afford to harbor much longer.