



72

NEWS from

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DOLE FINDS URANIUM BULLET PROPOSAL SHOCKING

Washington, D.C. --- In a statement before the Senate today, Senator Bob Dole(R-Kansas) termed the recent DoD proposal, to begin using depleted uranium to produce bullets, as a plan that "shows a complete lack of sensitivity to a general fear of using radioactive materials." Dole went on to point out that "It is a fact that the depleted uranium, instead of being used for bullets, could be used eventually to produce electricity.

At a time when we continually hear of an increasing energy crisis, it seems to me that the energy content of the uranium should at least be considered before anyone decides that uranium is only useful because it is heavy." Calling on the Administration, Dole emphasized that "they must realize that their proposed use of depleted uranium would deny that fuel to future generations."

Following is the text of Dole's statement:

Mr. Dole. Mr. President, an article appeared in the Washington Star on March 14, reporting that the Pentagon is about to start using depleted uranium to produce bullets. They seem to have chosen this material for bullets because uranium metal is dense, and because depleted uranium is cheap. Needless to say, I find this proposal shocking.

On the one hand, this plan shows a complete lack of sensitivity to a general fear of using radioactive materials. On the other hand, only a strange set of policy decisions could have made this material so cheap that anybody would consider using it for bullets.

RADIATION HAZARD

First of all, uranium is dangerous. If the DoD decides to pursue this project, much will be said during the next few months about the hazards of working with this material. If they do go ahead with this project, it will imply that the DoD is willing to subject their personnel to a new source of gamma radiation. Just when concerns are being expressed about the effects of low level radiation this project implies that the DoD already has all the answers.

But without minimizing the importance of health and safety, I would like to bring up another side of this issue. One important fact has not been mentioned in the press. It is a fact that the depleted uranium, instead of being used for bullets, could be used eventually to produce electricity.

At a time when we continually hear of an increasing energy crisis, it seems to me that the energy content of the uranium should at least be considered before anyone decides that uranium is only useful because it is heavy.

DEPLETED URANIUM

Depleted uranium is the material left over after fuel is made for commercial reactors. The name is somewhat misleading however, because there is an enormous amount of energy in this material.

To get that energy out, the material would have to be processed in a breeder reactor. In such a reactor, the material would be transmuted into plutonium and it could then be used as reactor fuel.

ENERGY CONTENT

Last night I did a little calculation to see just how much energy we were talking about putting into those bullets. It is remarkable. The Pentagon is talking about 3 ounces of uranium in each bullet. If that material were used as nuclear fuel, it would have the energy equivalent of about 700 barrels of oil -- in each bullet.

-2-

The news report also talks about a program to make 730,000 of the bullets. That is the equivalent of 510 million barrels of oil. That much energy could substitute for 85 days worth of oil imports. Yet the proposed program completely disregards the fact that the uranium might have other uses besides being shot from guns.

WHY MAKE BULLETS

Mr. President, it is very interesting why the Pentagon should come up with uranium when they looked around for a material for bullets. Depleted uranium is dense, but so are many other metals, like tungsten. The reason uranium looks so good is that it is cheap.

And why is it cheap? It is cheap because this Administration has decided to defer indefinitely the development of a commercial breeder reactor. And if we do decide to do without the breeder, we will essentially waste the energy content of the 270,000 tons of depleted uranium that we already have available in this country.

Again, let me tell you how much energy we are talking about. The depleted uranium that is already above the ground, that 270,000 tons, represents more energy than all the coal yet to be mined in this country. It is a truly astounding amount of energy.

But at this point, the Pentagon is right. The metal is practically worthless. We should keep in mind however, that it is not worthless because it has no real value. It is worthless because the Administration has decided that the United States is not going to exploit the energy in this material.

STILL HOPE TO BRING ON NEW SOURCES OF ENERGY

Mr. President, we all recognize that the future of the breeder reactor is somewhat in doubt at this point. But there are those of us who have not given up hope that our government will finally see that more energy supplies are the only real solution to our energy problems. When that time comes, a new decision will be made and I am confident that this country will move ahead with an aggressive program to develop and commercialize breeder reactors.

But in the meantime, the country continues to accumulate depleted uranium as it makes fuel for ordinary reactors. The question is whether we will save this extremely valuable material for use later, or whether we will think of it as useless in the near term, good for nothing except making bullets.

It seems to the Senator from Kansas that there is only one possible choice. We have now realized that fossil fuels will not last forever. It is folly to waste fuel that we might need in the future. While this Administration calls conservation the "cornerstone" of its energy policy, they must realize that their proposed use of depleted uranium would deny that fuel to future generations.

Mr. President, I would urge the Administration to adopt a realistic and consistent policy toward nuclear power and nuclear fuel.

We need to bring on all the alternative sources of energy that we can develop in this country. Breeder reactors are one alternative. While we are still developing that technology, it is folly to treat uranium as though it is a worthless metal, suitable only for making bullets.

-30-