

Senate, House Conferees Still Deadlocked Over Rivers Bill

Conferees from the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives remained deadlocked over controversial projects in an omnibus river development bill last night after 2½ hours of debate in a conference committee, Sen. Frank Church, D-Idaho, reported. North, Orofino.

House conferees remained adamant in insisting that Bruces Eddy and Burns Creek dams in Idaho, among other projects, be stricken from a Senate-passed authorization bill, Church told the Lewiston Morning Tribune in a telephone interview.

"I personally take the position that we either get Bruces Eddy or there will be no bill at all approved by Congress," Church said. "I am prepared to do whatever an individual senator can do to force the issue, including a filibuster as long as I can hold the Senate floor."

Church said House conferee went back to the House leadership for further instructions after arguing without avail with the Senate conferees, who held out for the Senate version of the authorization bill.

Resumption Possible

"It is possible that the conference will resume tomorrow," Church said, "so our vigil here will have to continue."

Church said it would "require a miracle" to win congressional approval of Burns Creek dam on the upper Snake River now that the House has rejected its authorization by a roll-call vote. He said "we have very serious trouble" with the Bruces Eddy project, on the North Fork of the Clearwater River, "owing to the adamant position the House conferees thus far have taken. It is difficult to predict what the outcome will be."

He said House conferees were not bound formally by a rule adopted by the House membership yesterday to refuse to concede on points in disagreement.

"The conferees are not instructed with respect to specific projects," Church said. "However, the criteria laid down by Rep. Howard Smith, D-Va., chairman of the House Rules Committee, have the strong support of several of the conferees."

Three House conferees had said Tuesday that they would oppose any projects added by the Senate on which House hearings have not been held, plus any projects added by the Senate which lack approval by the Bureau of the Budget. The stipulation respecting House hearings would involve Columbia River Basin projects submitted for authorization, but Church indicated that other arguments were being aired in the closed-door conference.

House Against Idaho Dams

"The House conferees are voicing strong objections to either Bruces Eddy or Burns Creek," he said. "They have listed a series of other projects that they ask be stricken from the bill, including the Knowles dam in Montana."

"Bruces Eddy and Knowles represent the last two big storage spots left for public development in the Pacific Northwest which not involve highly controversial locations that would destroy fisheries and cause undue damage to wildlife. The private power companies' opposition to Knowles is re-enactment of the Hells Canyon fight all over again. So the question we really face is whether we can get on with necessary public development in the Northwest whether we are to be permitted build only those dams which private utilities allow us to."

"I think the conservation groups should know by now how strongly I have supported the cause of wise conservation. I am disappointed that they should take so narrow a view of Bruces Eddy as to attempt to block it when the benefits it would confer in terms of power and flood control greatly outweigh the limited injury it would cause to fish and wildlife."

Church said Sen. Lee Metcalf, D-Mont., had been a "tremendous ally" in his fight to save the Senate-approved projects. He and Metcalf waited together throughout the conference last night, just outside the door, where they were able to consult periodically with Sen. Robert S. Kerr, D-Okla., chairman of the Senate conferees, and others.

The conference began at 6 p.m. (EDT) and broke up 2½ hours later without agreement on any of the projects in dispute.

Church said there are two views

as to the prospects for agreement.

"The pessimists say the terms laid down by the House are so strict that the conference will break up without any bill at all," he said. "The optimists say that the bill is so important to members in both branches that the conferees will attempt to split their differences and try to reach some settlement. The result of today's conference was not encouraging. We are in a very tough fight, and we will have to continue it."

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