Church still sees close results in SALT II approval

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U.S. Sen. Frank Church, D-Idaho, cahirman of the Senate Froeign Relations Committee, still sees close results in approval of the SALT II treaty.

Church, who counts himself as a treaty supporter as long as two provisions are approved, said in a Post-Register telephone interview Tuesday that between 10 and 15 swing senators will decide the issue. The treaty must be ratified by a two-thirds majority margin, or 67 of the 100 senators.

Church said the committee will complete its work on the treaty Tuesday, which will be reported to the Senate. It will then be up to Senate Majority Leader Robert Byrd, D-W.V., as to when the treaty comes up for a vote of the full Senate.

The committee approved the treaty 9-6 last week and Church said he voted in favor of the treaty after the committee voted 13-2 to accept his two provisions. These call for 1: Verification by the president that Soviet troops in Cuba are no longer engaged in a combat role, and 2: That the U.S. will not permit Russian military pressure in Cuba to become a threat in the Caribbean or elsewhere in the Western Hemisphere.

Church noted that he first disclosed the presence of some 2,500 combat Soviet troops in Cuba three months ago.

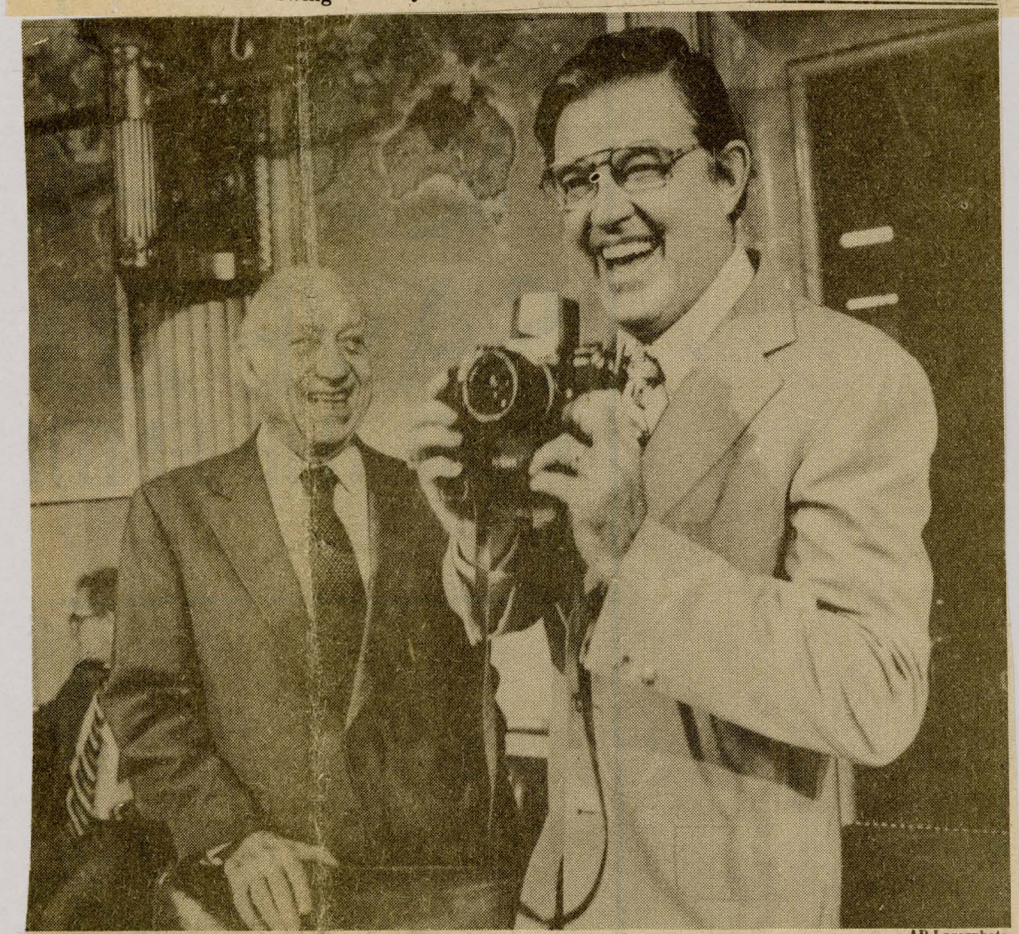
In other far-ranging topics, Church expressed the following views:

— Sugar legislation is dead and Idaho's two congressmen, Reps. Steve Symms and George Hansen, "took a beating" in the House failure to pass a sugar support bill he backed. He said he now will attempt "to pick up the pieces" by holding an International Sugar Agreement legislation in his committee until the president uses his existing authority to increase sugar prices from 15 cents per pound to 15.8 cents. Church said Secretary of Agriculture Robert Bergland and White House administration representatives are agreeing to his demand. Church expressed hope this will form the basis for strengthening world sugar prices and thus save American's domestic sugar industry.

— That he is pressing for an investigation by the Department of Energy of the drinking water of the Snake River acquifer below the Idaho National Engineering Laboratory to see that it has not been contaminated. Church said the presence of tritium must be well within federal guidelines.

— That the vote on the Reclamation Reform Act of 1979 is not expected until late March or early April but that he expects the bill he introduced will be adopted. The first hearings were conducted Tuesday in the House Interior and Insular Affairs Committee. Church said he is agreeing to a compromise of 1,120 acres, the maximum ownership allowed by a farm family, which is midway between the 1,280 he asked and the 960 the Department of Interior wanted.

— The much-debated Wilderness Bill came up for action in the Senate Tuesday and Church expressed hope the 2.2 million acres he asked will be adopted. He said he is supportive of amendments wanted by Sen. James A. McClure. He pointed out, however, that one amendment designating the Meadow Creek area in Idaho County and other land outside the wilderness area for multiple use would, in effect, scuttle the bill. He explained that Rep. Morris Udall, D-Ariz., the House committee chairman, will not accept this provision. Some 97,700 acres are embraced in the contested Meadow Creek area. Church said he is not opposed in principle to development of Forest Service land, but that it is hotly contested between the wood product and conservation people.



AP Laserphoto

Light moment at hearing

CHAIRMAN FRANK CHURCH, D-Idaho, right, of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, tries his hand with a press photographer's camera before hearings on the SALT II treaty. Obviously amused at Church's expertise is Sen. Jacob Javits, R-N.Y. Church predicts a close Senate vote on the treaty.