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Congressional comments . . .

McClure mum on trip to Arabian nations

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Sen. James A. McClure, R-Idaho, is strangely silent in failing to give a report on his trip to the Middle East, in contrast with his previous actions.

It was McClure's sixth trip to the oil-producing nations but unlike his earlier trips he has avoided giving a report despite repeated requests. In previous trips he has been willing, and most of the time, eager, to say how his efforts have helped smooth relations with the Middle East oil producers—and indeed they have.

In fact, his trips to the Middle East appeared more valuable than the strong pro-Israel stand that Sen. Frank Church was accused of taking.

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McClure is now chairman of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee and also the Senate Republican Conference Committee. This latter position as caucus chairman puts him third highest in the Senate majority leadership, just behind the majority and assistant majority leader. It would appear his present position has influenced him to shrink his lines of communication with the people of Idaho.

McClure traveled with such political heavyweights as Sen. Mark Hatfield, R-Ore; Bill Bradley, D.N.J., and Majority Leader Howard Baker, R-Tenn.

McClure commented at that time that it was absolutely imperative that the United States continue to build good relations with Saudi Arabia. He noted the Saudis have been a longtime reliable supplier of oil to the United States.

McClure also said Saudi Arabia has demonstrated repeatedly its desires to hold down OPEC oil prices, an important factor in America's economy. He correctly stated the United States is entering into a critical point in its relationship with Saudi Arabia. McClure's interest was to determine the extend of the relationship, military considerations tied to the shipment of Saudi oil, and

the ever present questions of future Saudi oil production and pricing. McClure left these important questions unanswered.

He also said he was curious about the construction of new oil refineries in Saudi Arabia and whether future shipments of crude oil would be accompanied by requirements to import gasoline and other refined products, thereby increasing this nation's dependence on imports. He added that during the past 12 years he has been urging domestic energy policies that would decrease foreign oil imports, adding that as committee chairman he believes this can be accomplished.

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It is significant that upon return of the delegation, President Reagan announced plans for sale of five sophisticated U.S. radar planes to Saudi Arabia, a move that didn't exactly meet the applause of Israel.

Baker warned that the administration doesn't have the support to get the sale through Congress at this time. The agreement contains a provision that arms to Saudi Arabia would be suspended if the plans were used against Israel, a rather nebulous condition.

None of the members of the delegation have issued any significant report about their trip which would indicate an ominous situation for the future.

McClure, instead, called a meeting of his energy committee to seek to strip more protection from the forest lands. He calls it "the rapid enactment of the RARE II Review Act of 1981 which would release non-wilderness Forest Service lands for multiple use management. Along the same line which shows his increasingly strong leanings for the big mining and timber interests and against the welfare of most Idaho recreational users is his announced intentions to hold public hearings to drastically reduce the 482,640 acre Bird of Prey Area along the Snake River south of Boise.