

McClure predicts solid future at INEL

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Sen. James A. McClure, R-Idaho, Tuesday predicted a solid future for the Idaho National Engineering Laboratory. Although some projects could end, he said, these would probably be replaced by other programs.

In a telephone interview with The Post-Register from his Washington office, McClure said "there will be no dramatic down draft. There could be some reactors shut down but others, and maybe larger ones, will take their place."

"The future at the INEL looks good," McClure said.

He said, for example, that when the old Materials Test Reactor closed it was viewed as a disaster, but it was replaced by even larger programs.

"I think the same thing will continue in the future," McClure said.

He said the Loss of Fluid Test program has been rumored as being about to close down.

"However," said McClure, chairman of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, "it now looks like it will be extended through 1983 as result of action taken by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission because it wants the research capability to feed in on various nuclear breeder programs."

McClure said much of the INEL future will hinge on what is finally decided for the Clinch River Breeder Reactor in Tennessee.

He said President Carter had marked this project for the ashcan, but President Reagan has placed it on a priority nuclear list.

He said if the Clinch River Breeder Reactor is built, then it is probable any large reactor eyed for the INEL would be delayed.

"It is a matter of economics," said McClure, "how much money can we spend to justify such programs?"

He said the plan to go ahead with the Clinch River breeder would then place a damper on the proposed

fast breeder reactor which is mentioned for the INEL and which would cost several billion dollars.

McClure said that in his estimation there is a 50-50 chance the Clinch River facility will win approval. He said the House Science and Technology Committee voted 21-19 just recently against the Clinch River breeder at this time.

"I think on budgetary matters, we may see some things scaled back but no major and drastic changes," he said.

He said there are some reductions in store for alcohol fuels, hydropower and geothermal energy programs.

He said they could mean a cutback of 350-400 employees, but there are still 10,000 employed at INEL.

McClure said there are dozens of technical programs on the drawing board and many of these likely will go to the INEL to "give an opportunity for maintenance and expansion."