The western scene . . .

West governors favor mild nuclear position

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SUN VALLEY — Western governors, led by Washington state's dynamic governor, Dixy Lee Ray, showed in their four-day conference which concluded Wednesday afternoon that they rely heavily on nuclear power to meet the mounting energy needs.

Miss Ray, known affectionately among her peers as "the atomic lady" because of her expertise in nuclear affairs as well as her bubbling personality, took the lead in adopting a mild resolution that is intended to solve the radioactive waste problem.

Of the 11 western governors attending, plus two from territories, only Hawaii Gov. George Ariyoshi appeared less than a warm disciple of nuclear power. Ariyoshi stopped a British ship loaded with radioactive waste material from docking at Honolulu last week. The ship then docked at Pearl Harbor and was handled by the U.S. Navy.

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The resolution on nuclear waste was a compromise that was hammered out to meet conflicting views.

It is actually of two parts.

One resolution urges the president to act immediately on the recommendations of the Interagency Regulatory Group, and the National Governors' Conference subcommittee on nuclear power by the time of the National Governor's Conference, scheduled for July 8-11 at Louisville, Ky.

Kirk Hall, Boise, Idaho Office of Energy director, explained the IRG was established in 1977 by the Department of Energy, National Regulatory Commission and interested states. It was supposed to come up with recommendations to the president on nuclear policies.

These recommendations were submitted about a month ago, said Hall. The National Governor's Association then met in Denver to make recommendations.

These recommendations, said Hall, call for creation of a high-level State-Federal Planning Council to push for development of process of concurrence for disposal of high radioactive wastes from commercial breeder reactors.

The resolution in its second phase urges that if the NGA has taken no action, that the president and governors of all of the states meet in a summit-type conference within three months to overcome the obstacles to creation of a disposal facility for the high-level radioactive wastes generated by the commercial power industry.

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The resolution, as can be seen, makes no reference to the Idaho National Engineering Laboratory and its radioactive waste management.

As Hall pointed out, however, unless the problem of permanent deposit of radioactive waste is settled, there will always be a question on nuclear power.

"If this isn't settled," he said, "it means there will be no nuclear power in the future," and he could be right.

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In discussions, Miss Ray pointed out nuclear power has an excellent accident record. She deplored listening to what she called a small but vocal opposition to the nuclear power industry.

"We support nuclear energy as a viable option," she thundered in debate.

She said a bill pressing for development should be pressed in Congress, referring to one sponsored by U.S. Sen Frank Church, D-Idaho, influential chairman of the Senate energy, research and development subcommittee, that asks for full speed ahead on nuclear power research and also for quickly selecting a permanent radioactive waste repository.

Miss Ray pointed out utilities have taken a beating on their nuclear power installations and expansions and they are not going to invest any more money unless the controversies are settled.

Miss Ray said there is altogether too much emotionalism generated about the entire concept of nuclear power. She added this should be ignored and we should go ahead on facts, rather than fancies.

Dixy Lee Ray

She even went so far as to say in an interview with this writer, the present radioactive wastes stored at Hanford in her state and the INEL should be kept there rather than transferring them.

"What are people worried about?" she asked. "They aren't hurting anything so what's the problem?"