

Congress may end Santa Barbara oil leases

President Nixon has asked Congress to enact legislation which would cancel all oil drilling leases in the Pacific Ocean near Santa Barbara—where the nation's worst oil spill helped spur nationwide concern with the environment.

The area would be made into a marine sanctuary of almost 200,000 acres of ocean bed between Santa Barbara and Santa Cruz Island, which is about 25 miles offshore. The State of California already has set up a sanctuary along the Santa Barbara Channel.

Sen. Alan Cranston, California Democrat, termed the presidential proposal "too little, too late." Cranston, noting there are 50 leases outside the sanctuary area which could pose a "continuing threat," said he would continue to push his legislation which would terminate all offshore leases.

Lois Sidenberg, President of Santa Barbara's "Get Oil Out" organization, labeled Nixon's action a "sop" and added, "You could have as damaging an accident or a blowout outside the sanctuary as within it."

In 1968, the federal government sold drilling leases. Oil firms paid \$178 million for 23 leases and quickly began drilling. Only three—operated by Union Oil and Phillips Petroleum—are operating now, and would continue to do so temporarily. A federal court, under terms of the Nixon proposal, would determine the losses suffered by the oil companies, and the government would reimburse them.

The House Science and Astronautics Committee may propose a new legislative office of technology assessment. The agency would consist of a 50- to 75-man staff which would serve, at the request of any Congressional committee, to study the impact of technological innovation before it is put into practice.

Such a committee could, for example, study thoroughly the environmental effects of an SST *before* it is built.

According to the Washington *Star*, a number of Senators are interested in making a parallel proposal in the Senate.

Ralph Nader urged the Federal Trade Commission June 14 to ban sales of household detergents containing enzymes.

If it will not or cannot stop sales then he asked detergent manufacturers to warn consumers of the "dangers" posed by the

enzymes. The FTC is reportedly studying the question.

Under present standards, the level of air pollution would not reach a safe level in American cities until at least 1990, according to HEW. *Newsweek* reported that Senator Edmund Muskie and his subcommittee on air and water pollution are drawing up a bill to clean up American cities in three years to meet the minimum standards set by HEW. Carrying out this bill would mean restricted use of automobiles in major cities to meet a "single US ambient air standard"

government environment

Rep. Henry S. Reuss of Wisconsin, leading congressional critic of the proposed supersonic transport (SST), charges that the Boeing Co. itself in a secret study predicts that regular operations by the giant aircraft would produce atmospheric changes that could alter the climate.

Boeing denies the existence of such a report.

Reuss maintains the study exists and adds that, despite its findings, Congress was told by the Department of Transportation—a strongly pro-SST agency—that there was no scientific support for suggestions that the SST would pollute the upper atmosphere.

Reuss made his charge on June 7. The House of Representatives already has approved the Department of Transportation Fiscal Year '71 budget, which contains funds for SST development, but the budget item faces a tougher fight in the Senate.

The study, according to Reuss, concludes that water vapor left in the air by a fleet of 100 SSTs would cause cloud formations that could significantly decrease the earth's temperature. It also states that the vapor would destroy part of the ozone in the upper air, resulting in damage to the "shield" which protects the earth from ultraviolet radiation.

UPI reported recently that the widely used pesticide dieldrin is contributing to the thinning population of the bald eagle, the national bird. UPI quoted Interior Department scientists as saying they have detected poisoning from dieldrin in growing numbers of bald eagles found dead in

the U.S. Bald eagles are considered an endangered species in 48 states.

Meanwhile, the first public hearing on the possibility of leasing additional federal offshore lands is scheduled for July 14 in New Orleans.

The hearing is a direct result of the Santa Barbara oil spill, which killed birds and marine life, and coated beaches. Interior Secretary Walter Hickel ordered, as a result of the spill, a tightening of regulations governing leasing and safety—and also called for public hearings when he deemed them necessary.

In announcing the July 14 hearing, Hickel said: "I want to stress that no further federal offshore oil lease offers will be made unless I am satisfied that oil and gas development in the area is fully compatible with protection of all resources."

Earlier, Chevron Oil Co. was indicted by a federal grand jury in New Orleans for "knowingly and willfully" failing to install safety devices that officials say could have prevented a recent fire and oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. Seven wells caught fire in February, and before they were put out, oil had spilled at the rate of about 1,000 barrels a day.

Hickel asked for those who testify at the hearing to consider:

—Any adverse environmental effects that could not be avoided if the leases were allowed.

—Alternatives to the proposals.

—"Any irreversible and irretrievable commitments of resources" which would be involved in the leasing were to be implemented.

Those wishing to testify should contact the manager of the New Orleans office of the Bureau of Land Management, 701 Loyola Avenue, New Orleans, La., 70150. Written comment from those unable to attend should be addressed to the Bureau of Land Management, Washington, D.C.

UPI reports that Sen. Clifford P. Hansen of Wyoming is worried that the oil and gas industries are receiving unfavorable press coverage. He suggested a few weeks ago that "oil and gas companies [should] use advertising expenditures to influence newspapers to present more favorable news about the industry."

Sen. Hansen is concerned that among too many Americans, "oil is a dirty word."