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NUCLEAR ENERGY

Early this year, 34 key scientists, ten of them Nobel prize winners, signed a manifesto attesting to the urgency and importance of nuclear power as "a clean, inexpensive and inexhaustible domestic fuel." They added: "We can see no reasonable alternative to an increased use of nuclear power to satisfy our energy needs."

Of the many obstacles strewn in the path of permitting nuclear power to help solve our energy crisis, Defense Secretary-James ScQlesinger is at the top of the list. During his brief tenure as chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission {before moving into the Pentagon}, he caused the licensing of new nuclear power plants to slow down to a crawl.

Whereas, under his predecessor, a nuclear power plant could have been licensed in five years, Schlesinger stretched this out so that it takes up to eleven years to grope through the bureaucratic red tape to attain a license.

This procedure does not merely cause frustration for nuclear power plant applicants seeking to build new plants needed to ease our energy crisis. It ties up an enormous financial commitment with no return for more than a decade. With some 200 new plants under consideration, this means that the industry has tied up a commitment of some $100 billion.

Even worse than the impounding of money by this bureaucratic

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delay is the lockup of brainpower it requires. To license a nuclear power plant, there must be an initial preliminary study that takes two years and produces, literally, two tons of paper work. This means that our most brilliant, most experienced, and most extensively and expensively trained scientists and tech nologists are condemned to devote their capabilities and their irreplaceable time to useless, noncreative "busy work."

The result is that nuclear power plants have been prime casu alties of increasing capital costs. In 1965 eight plants were announced and their estimated costs averaged $119 per kilowatt.

Last year, eight new plants were announced and their average estimated cost was $558 per kilowatt. The passage of time has thus added several hundred million dollars to the cost of each new nuclear power plant, and there is not a thing the company can do to prevent it.

Nuclear power has grown in importance from providing ·one percent of U.S. electric power generation to five percent in 1974. By 1985 it could provide 30 percent and thereby save tremendous amounts of cash which are now going overseas to buy foreign oil.

It could be much higher.if the American people demand it. At a higher percentage, we could conserve our petroleum resources for priority uses such as national security, aviation, agriculture, and medicines.

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