Congressman Tom Harkin Reports from Washington

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LEDGES STATE PARK Public awareness and outcry has focused attention on the fact that, by operating Saylorville Dam according to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' 1968 design specifications, there is a serious danger of inadvertently converting the lower levels of Ledges State Park, at Boone, into devastated woodland and mudflats.

These areas would include the canyon road at the confluence of Davis and Pease Creeks (whose unique and intimate beauty prompted ISU's Dr. Louis Pammel to lobby for preservation of the Ledges as a state park in the early 1900's), plus the lowlying public grounds near the baseball diamond and concession stand.

Sadly, recognition of this impending loss came too late for prevention by outright changes in the design of Saylorville Dam. There are still three "second-best" alternatives to remedy or reduce flooding in the lower Ledges, all of which would require supplemental appropriations of federal funds by the Congress.

First, there is the alternative of increased outflow through the Saylorville floodgates during seasonally high waters--as during the annual snowmelt. Second, there is the possibility of operating Saylorville Dam with "open conduits," which would maintain the recreational pool behind the dam while still reducing the depth and duration of flood pools which would affect the Ledges. And third, a barrier dike could be built at the mouth of Pease Creek canyon, which would permanently prevent Saylorville floodwaters from entering the Ledges.

I have determined, in a meeting on May 16 at my Ames office with Colonel Walter Johnson, head of the Rock Island District Corps of U.S. Army Engineers, that the Corps' position is essentially neutral. To quote Colonel Johnson, "We will do what the people of Iowa want, provided we can get the funds from Congress. If the people of Iowa want a barrier dike, or open conduit, we're willing to start work tomorrow."

The full ramifications and ecological impact of each of these proposals would require a massive report. However, the open conduit and increased seasonal outflow alternatives would require land acquisition downstream to accomodate higher waters below the dam than originally planned--possibly including a "Greenbelt" from Saylorville to Red Rock Reservoir. On the other hand, the barrier dike would require moving about 130 acres of earth fill in order to build it. This would almost certainly have to be an upland, "white oak" earth with good clay content.

My commitment to save the Ledges is firm, and my responsibility as a Congressman will be to do my utmost to ensure that supplemental appropriations are made, to implement whichever plan Iowans decide is best. Personally, I favor the barrier dike--and I have asked the Army Corps to prepare a feasibility study for the dike alternative. Without that study, a hard commitment to build the dike is impossible; and on that account, I am disturbed that no serious effort to determine the dike's feasibility has yet been undertaken--while State and federal bureaucrats drift inexorably toward the other alternatives.

THE ULLMAN ENERGY PROPOSALS President Ford has repeatedly criticized the Congress for alleged "failure to act" on a comprehensive energy plan to reduce U.S. dependence on foreign oil. He has now ignored a gentleman's agreement made on February first and imposed a second dollar-a-barrel tax on imported oil "to prod the Congress into action."

Many members of Congress, back in February, felt the President's own energy proposals (chief among them being the oil import duties) were patched together in undue haste, and were fully prepared to rescind the President's power to raise import tax levels unless Congress was granted time to come up with its own energy plan. Now, after four months of work, the House Ways and Means Committee, chaired by Rep. Al Ullman, has finally produced a long-awaited "Energy Conservation and Conversion" bill.

Taken as a whole, the Ullman proposals seem reasonable in intent. However, considered point-by-point, several extremely important areas of controversy have already developed.

Basically, the new bill is designed to promote consumer conservation of motor fuels--the largest single factor in petroleum consumption--while simultaneously discouraging the automotive industry's infatuation with oversize "gas guzzlers." There would be a 3¢ retail gasoline tax, a tax rebate for necessary driving (thus penalizing luxury driving alone), and a tax on manufacture of low-mileage cars.

Also, the bill seeks to restrict oil imports over the next decade with gradually tighter import quotas. In theory, lower quotas would keep pace with reduced demand for foreign oil--as American businesses take advantage of profitable incentives to recycle waste products which take less energy to reuse than to manufacture originally (such as scrap aluminum), and to convert from foreign oil to domestic energy supplies.

Revenues raised by these various new taxes would be channeled into an "Energy Trust Fund" to pay for research and development of alternate energy sources--a proposal which is already controversial.

While the Ullman bill does apparently avoid the worst consequence of the Administration's energy plan--namely, an estimated $12 to $15 BILLION in new inflation caused by the broad-based duty on imported oil --the trust fund and other features have already provoked a flurry of proposed amendments.

Opponents of the trust fund section, for instance, point out that low and middle income Americans would bear the brunt of providing funds (through the retail gasoline tax) for energy research. Such revenues, they say, could more fairly be raised by closing numerous tax loopholes now enjoyed by the petroleum industry.

While the President's plan is clearly too inflationary, it is equally clear that the Ullman proposals will need careful consideration --and probably amendment--before we can come up with an energy package which is acceptable to American consumers.

FARM CZAR The same afternoon that President Ford vetoed the Emergency Farm Bill, I happened to meet Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz over in the halls of the Rayburn Building. Butz was, of course, the man who advised the President to veto, and the chief architect of the USDA's campaign against higher target prices and loan rates.

To put it mildly, I told the Secretary I was disappointed to hear about the veto. Butz, however, rejected my fears that many farmers would be caught in the squeeze between high operating costs and low commodity prices--and so be forced off their farms. He retorted that "corn and wheat prices will be high this year."

I couldn't believe he'd said that. I asked Butz why, if that was true, his department had claimed just days before that farm prices would drop so low it would take up to $5 billion to implement the target price increases we Agriculture Committee members were calling for. But America's farm czar just stared at me, and turned and walked away. # # #