

No official decision made

Metric switch inevitable?

WASHINGTON — Adoption of the metric system is not mandatory, but the United States is moving toward it without a clear understanding of what is involved or whether the change is worth the effort, the General Accounting Office says.

Unless benefits are apparent, it said, no nation or organization should convert to metrics "simply because metrication is thought to be inevitable."

Contrary to the widespread impression, no official decision has yet been made on whether to switch to metric or stay with the traditional measurement system, the GAO said in a report released Monday.

Responses to GAO questionnaires showed 42 percent of the small businesses, 30 percent of the building and construction associations and 23 percent of the people contacted believed conversion to a metric system is mandatory.

The survey also showed conversion is opposed by most people, but is supported strongly by state education groups, state government officials, and large industrial companies.

Actions by federal agencies, multi-national firms, educators, and others aided by a general feeling of inevitability and misstatements about metrication throughout the

country tend to forge a metric policy for the entire nation. A policy to convert to the metric system should be made by the representatives of the people, the Congress," GAO said.

It said the cost of converting U.S. weights and measures to the metric system is not known, despite various estimates made over the past decade by various organizations and individuals.

"These estimates vary widely and often are not based on detailed analyses of the factors involved," the report said. However, the report said, based on its limited information, the cost of conversion "will be significant, in the billions of dollars. But whatever the cost, it appears it will be passed on to consumers."

GAO, the investigative arm of Congress, said an "inevitability syndrome" has developed, causing companies and individuals to believe a switch to metrics is inevitable. A major factor was the 1975 passage of the Metric Conversion Act and the creation of a U.S. Metric Board.

"The name of the act connotes conversion," the report said.

Some federal agencies are moving independently to make wider use of metrics. The Federal Highway Administration, for example, attempted to require highway signs to

use metric figures.

But GAO says the advantage of metrics has not been fully established.

"For most consumer products and for activities such as sports (except

those involved in international records), no major benefits would occur to either producers, consumers, or participants and spectators by converting to the metric system," the report said.



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Hill and Clements hold TV debate

HOUSTON — The first televised debate in the governor's race between John Hill and Bill Clements provoked claims by both men that they were conducting the campaign on a high level. However, they still managed to aim a few personal criticisms at one another.

Covered in the debate Tuesday were taxation, energy, education, the role of Texas government, and political ethics.

Attorney General Hill, the Democratic nominee, accused Clements of training ethical standards by profiting in his company's multimillion-dollar oil equipment transactions with Iran while he served in the U.S. Defense Department.

"There isn't anything to it. Those are charges which have come out of the liberal Democrats in Washington," Clements said. "I never made any decision (in the Defense Department) with respect to Iran. That's just a lot of baloney."

Hill disagreed, saying Clements should have put his many business interests in a blind trust while in public office, as he (Hill) had.

"I've just been working for the folks and haven't made any money on the side. I think it's a legitimate matter for the press to comment on," Hill said.

Clements, the oilman-businessman from Dallas, rebutted with an attack on Hill's operation of the state's top legal agency.

"He has dipped into areas where he should not have been. He has a private police force operating out of the attorney general's office," Clements said. "He's probably got the fastest growing bureaucracy in state government."

Clements accused Hill of wanting to improve education by raising teacher salaries, and of making the attorney general's office a political weapon. He said Hill is blindly supporting President Carter's energy bill.

Hill countered with claims that Clements has proposed an unwise reduction in taxes and has obscured the campaign issues in smoke screens directed at his six years in public office.

"I think we need sales tax revenues to be put into our school programs," Hill said. He proposed that

taxes be divided one-third for property tax, one-third for school funds and one-third for "other needs."

Clements called for a constitutional amendment banning a personal income tax in the state.

"I'm for reducing taxes now," Clements said. "We have a surplus. It should be returned to the taxpayers."

Concerning education, Clements said, "What he (Hill) has really said is he wants to automatically increase teacher salaries to improve the quality of education in our state. I want to get back to the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic."

Clements said the issue with the energy bill in Congress was economic. Hill said it was a political issue that could be resolved in the courts.

In closing, Clements made one final effort to separate the political profiles of the two.

He said, "My opponent and I are not two peas in a pod. We're not even on the same vine. We're not in the same garden."

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#2 PLAIN TALK 2 FROM ARMCO ON FINDING A JOB:

How the energy crisis chills your chances

Are you getting ready to look for the perfect job? More power to you. Literally. You'll need it. America is having trouble finding the energy it takes to make you a job.

Led by American ingenuity, the world today works by harnessing plenty of energy. Thank goodness. The alternative is human drudgery. Yet because our system is energy intensive, a recent movement calls us wasteful. Our basic approach to using energy is wrong, say these zealots. Big is bad. Small is beautiful and the soft path (isolated, local energy systems—even individual ones) is what we need.

Could you really depend on a windmill to power your hospital? How much steel could you make with a mirror in your yard?

A curious combination of social reformers, wilderness fanatics and modern-day mystics has brought America's energy development almost to its knees. They've stalled the nuclear approach and stymied coal. They've choked down natural gas exploration and hamstringed oil. Their love of exotic energy sources—sun, wind, geothermal and tidal action—will last only until a few big projects get underway. Then, chances are they'll find a way to turn them off, too. Our real energy crisis is a crisis of common sense.

Our government seems to actually encourage this madness. Politicians entertain harebrained schemes to tax this, ban that, rig fuel prices and regulate their use. We've strangled the market system, the only approach that can deliver as much of each kind of fuel as people choose to buy.

There's a direct connection between finding more energy and creating more jobs. More of one makes more of the other. By the end of this century, we'll need 75% more energy than we're using today. Right now, 93,000,000 American men and women have jobs. Over the next ten years,

we'll have to create another 17,000,000 jobs for more Americans, including you.

Plain talk about ENERGY

We Americans already know how to solve the energy crisis. We have the technology to reach solutions. Yet each solution comes with its own set of political problems. Natural gas mustn't cost too much. Offshore oil mustn't spoil our beaches. Coal mustn't rape the land or poison the air. The atom mustn't threaten to destroy us. Energy conservation mustn't inconvenience people too much.

Fair enough. But so far, we're paying more attention to the problems than we are to the energy itself. We've got to stop making every social goal an ideological crusade. We need to think things through and make rational trade-offs if we're ever going to get those 17,000,000 new jobs.

Next time some energy zealot crusades for anything, test the crusade against this question: Does it produce—or save—at least one Btu's worth of energy? If not, it won't do a thing to help you get a job.

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