

# Safety concerns stall weapon production

WASHINGTON (AP) — The only U.S. plant that makes a critical component of nuclear weapons won't be able to resume production until at least next spring or summer because of persistent safety concerns, Energy Secretary John S. Herrington said Tuesday.

Just last month, Energy Department officials said their Savannah River Plant, near Aiken, S. C., would begin a phased restart of its K reactor in December, and that it could resume production of tritium in January.

None of the three reactors at Savannah River has produced weapons material since last April.

"We are hoping to start (the K reactor) in the spring, summer," Herrington said in an interview with the Associated Press.

"We are not going to start up or operate a reactor that we are not satisfied is totally safe," he said.

Since October, engineers with the Energy Department and the operating contractor, the E.I. du Pont de Nemours & Co., have been developing much more stringent operating and safety criteria.

"I am satisfied with the progress. I think our start-up criteria, our modifications and our upgrade are proceeding well," he said. "I do not want to put a predicted date on the start-up."

The three reactors at Savannah River are the only operational facilities in the United States capable of producing two critical nuclear weapons materials, tritium and plutonium.

## Paper reports LSD being sold to Mexican kids

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Lawmakers from the Federal District called for an investigation into reports that large quantities of the drug LSD are being sold to children, the government newspaper *El Nacional* said Tuesday.

*El Nacional* said the Federal District assembly also called for harsh penalties in Mexico City for those caught selling or importing the hallucinogenic drug.

Mexico City newspapers regularly have carried reports that stamps and tattoos laced with LSD are being sold to children in local markets. The stamps are printed with designs, often blue stars or cartoon characters such as Mickey Mouse, according to the news reports.

Herrington has told Congress that the United States is "awash" in plutonium.

Tritium decays at the rate of 5.5 percent per year and administration and congressional sources say stockpiles will be depleted badly within six months to two years, although the exact numbers are classified.

Tritium, a radioactive isotope of hydrogen, is used to boost the yield of nuclear weapons.

Asked when tritium would be in critical short supply, Herrington said: "I think we are OK with spring and summer." He declined to give an exact date.

Herrington listed these new safety measures for Savannah River:

- Requiring the shift supervisor to have an engineering degree. Officials at Savannah River say that nine

out of the 12 shift supervisors hold degrees and the gap can be closed by reassigning engineers from other duties;

- Adding more technical support on each shift;
- Using a five-shift rotation for key operations workers, one more shift than before, which would free an entire shift for training at any given time. This will double the hours each shift spends per year on a computer simulator;

• Completing seismic reviews and modifications necessary to assure the ability of safety systems to shut down the reactor, remove decay heat and monitor conditions;

- Increase Energy Department headquarters oversight and approval of key start-up procedures.

## Economy survives drought with ease; inflation picks up

WASHINGTON (AP) — The economy shrugged off the summer drought and grew at a respectable 2.6 percent annual rate in the July-September period, but inflation picked up, the government said Tuesday.

The Commerce Department said the performance of the gross national product, the broadest measure of economic health, slowed in the third quarter after growing at an annual rate of 3.0 percent in the second quarter and 3.4 percent in the first three months of the year.

It was the slowest pace since the fourth quarter of 1986, when the economy grew at a sluggish 1.4 percent rate.

However, the department said the picture was distorted by the summer drought that hit much of the nation. Without the drought, growth would have been 3.9 percent in the second quarter and 3.2 percent in the third quarter.

So far, a little less than half of the \$12.8 billion in drought losses have been accounted for in the GNP. They are likely to shave as much as 1.2 percent off the fourth quarter average.

Higher prices accompanied the growth. The government said a price index tied to the GNP, which is adjusted to exclude the effects of changing buying patterns, rose at an annual rate of 5.1 percent in the

third quarter, edging up from 5.0 percent in the second quarter. It was the steepest increase in more than six years.

The growth figure and the price index represent revisions from an advance estimate last month, when GNP was reported at a 2.2 percent rate and the price index at 4.9 percent.

In other economic developments:

- The Commerce Department reported that after-tax corporate profits in the third quarter were nearly flat. They rose only 0.2 percent to \$163.1 billion, following an exceptionally large increase of 8.9 percent a quarter earlier. It was corporate America's poorest performance since a loss in the fourth quarter of 1987.
- The Agriculture Department predicted food prices would rise by 3 percent to 5 percent next year, after rising about 4 percent this year. The forecast came from James R. Donald, chairman of the department's World Agricultural Outlook Board.

At the White House, spokesman Marlin Fitzwater said the latest GNP report does not change "the basic economic picture" of moderate growth and steady inflation.

"Inflation remains at about the second-quarter rate," he said. "After . . . the drought, the economy continues to grow at its long-term average pace, which is 2 to 3 percent."

## Bush seeks quick approval of cabinet picks from Senate

WASHINGTON (AP) — President-elect George Bush told Senate Republican leaders Tuesday he will seek speedy confirmation of his Cabinet, perhaps with hearings beginning even before he takes office on Jan. 20.

Bush also told the GOP senators he hopes any "honeymoon period" with Congress can yield a federal budget compromise, according to participants in a private get-acquainted meeting at the Capitol.

Sen. Alan Simpson, R-Wyo., said the president-elect indicated he wanted to meet with "a bipartisan group to discuss his thoughts" before submitting a budget outline of his own.

However, Sen. Lloyd Bentsen, D-Texas, chairman of the Senate Finance Committee and the 1988 Democratic vice presidential candidate, said Bush "should not be in the position of not sending any budget up."

"This will be his first test of leadership," Bentsen said. "He has to show what he believes in — national defense, Medicare, revenues? He has to speak to the principal points

of the budget. That's part of the price of leadership. They just won an election. It's theirs to call."

Republican senators said the vice president indicated during their meeting that he would take up the matter of early confirmations with the Senate's newly chosen majority leader, George Mitchell of Maine. Bush called Mitchell to congratulate him shortly after Tuesday's secret-ballot election among Senate Democrats.

In 1981, the Senate, then controlled by the Republicans, voted confirmation of key appointments of President Reagan's within hours of his inauguration. Democrats now have a majority in the Senate.

"It would be important to his administration if he could have early action on confirmation, particularly with some of the key people like (James) Baker," Bush's choice for secretary of state, Sen. Thad Cochran, R-Miss, said.

Cochran said that, if Democrats went along, confirmation hearings could be held on Bush's nominations before they are formally submitted. "The Congress does come into

session on Jan. 3, we could do some work between then and the inauguration," Cochran said.

He said that Bush indicated he would like the Senate to "expedite the hearings and consideration of those nominees to those Cabinet positions so that when the president is inaugurated, they started to work right away, with the Cabinet in place."

Three members of Reagan's Cabinet that Bush has indicated he will retain — Attorney General Dick Thornburgh, Education Secretary Lauro F. Cavazos and Treasury Secretary Nicholas Brady — do not require re-confirmation by the Senate.

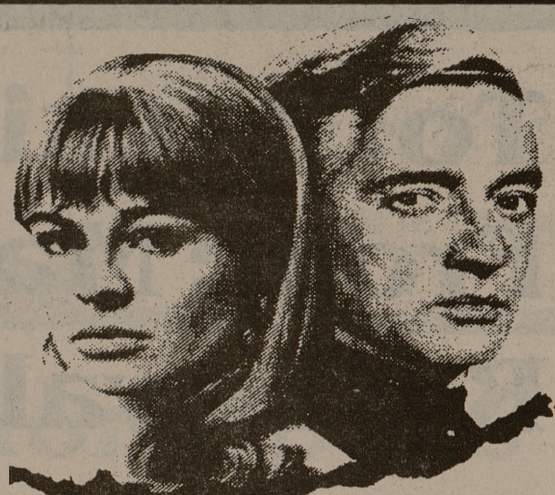
In other developments Tuesday: • Aides to defeated Democratic rival Michael Dukakis and Democrat Jesse Jackson said the two men would meet this week with Bush.

• A source close to the Bush transition, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said a decision by Bush on defense secretary could come by Wednesday. The source said Bush still favors former Sen. John Tower of Texas.



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