

Ford Called Undecided on Energy Bill

11-14-75
NYT

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Nov. 13 — President Ford reportedly told a group of Republican members of Congress tonight that he had made "no firm decision" on whether to sign or veto legislation that would reduce the price of crude oil produced in the United States in the next two years.

The legislation was approved last night by a House-Senate conference committee. The conference agreement, apparently breaking a year-long deadlock between Congress and the Ford Administration over energy policy, was negotiated by Frank G. Zarb, head of the Federal Energy Administration.

According to Ron Nessen, Mr. Ford's press secretary, the President confirmed at the meeting tonight that Mr. Zarb had recommended that he sign the measure.

Democrats and Republicans in Congress said earlier today that it was inconceivable to them that the President would veto the bill after his chief energy adviser had approved it and publicly recommended that Mr. Ford sign it.

A ranking official at the energy administration said today that the odds were "ten to one" that Mr. Ford would allow the bill to become law.

The meeting tonight, which lasted more than two hours,

was sought by the Republican legislators, many of whom have urged the President to veto the bill.

Senator John G. Tower of Texas called the bill a "blueprint for economic disaster" and a "grossly irresponsible piece of legislation."

Senator Lowell P. Weicker Jr. of Connecticut termed the measure "an accommodation to politics, not energy."

Mr. Nessen said that the 19 senators and representatives at the meeting had provided the President with "variations of opinion on both sides" of the issue.

However, of those at the meeting, only Senator Robert T. Stafford of Vermont is known to have favored lower rather than higher fuel prices.

Mr. Nessen said that Mr. Ford would make no decision on the legislation until a final draft of the bill had been

printed, probably not until late next week.

Present controls on oil prices are due to expire Saturday night. Mr. Nessen said that Mr. Ford would agree to a 30-day extension of the current controls to give him time to examine the new legislation.

If the President does sign the bill, it will amount to a reversal of position because he has argued all year that higher fuel prices are necessary if the country is to become less reliant on imported oil.

The bill would immediately reduce the price to consumers of a gallon of gasoline by about 3.5 cents, according to Congressional economists. The price would be permitted to rise gradually over the next 40 months.

Oil industry spokesmen predicted the new bill would reduce domestic exploration.
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