Congress will battle against proliferation

Senate split confirmation of Malone

Washington

Democrats in the US Congress are shaping up for what is expected to be a major confrontation with the new Republican Administration over proposals to loosen controls on the export of nuclear technology and materials. Already they have tried, albeit unsuccessfully, to block Mr Reagan's nominee for the position of Chief Nuclear Advisor to the State Department — Mr James Malone — as a warning shot to the Administration that it can expect fierce opposition if it tries to relax existing controls too far or too fast.

Mr Malone had previously been the General Counsel of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA) under President Nixon. Shortly after Mr Reagan's election last November he was appointed to head the transition team for ACDA. And his nomination for the State Department post, officially known as Assistant Secretary for Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs, has been warmly supported by the conservative Republican, Senator Jesse Helms of North Carolina.

Last week his nomination was formally approved by the Republican-dominated Foreign Relations Committee in the Senate, and confirmation by the full Senate remains a formality. However, five of the fifteen members of the committee voting cast their ballots against Mr Malone, expressing concern that the type of proposals he was supporting for speeding up nuclear exports would increase the risk of the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

Several Democrat members of the Senate committee, including Senator John Glenn of Ohio, a strong supporter of stiff anti-proliferation measures, also raised concerns about possible conflicts of interest. During the Carter Administration Mr Malone has been a member of a Washington law firm, Doub and Muntzing, which includes among its clients groups in Japan who have been seeking permission to export nuclear technology from the United States.

During the committee hearings on his nomination, Mr Malone was reluctant to provide much detail of the extent to which his company had been involved in furthering the goals of such clients. His reluctance provided Mr Glenn with an excuse to hold up his nomination for several weeks, and the committee members unhappy with his appointment are proposing strict procedures to prevent any conflict of interest.

Their main concern, however, is a broader one, namely, that Mr Malone seems keen to dismantle many of the nuclear export controls introduced during the Carter Administration, in particular parts of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Act of 1978. This act requires countries to accept international safeguards on their nuclear installations before they can receive US-produced nuclear technology or materials, and to obtain US permission before these are transferred to a third party, for example, for the reprocessing of spent fuel.

The transition team report on ACDA suggested that a new office be created within the State Department that would centralize all aspects of nuclear export policy — including the assessment of whether the receiving country was obeying international safeguards, a role at present performed by the Nuclear Regulatory Committee. The nuclear industry, already facing the prospect of a major slump in domestic demand, favours such centralization in order to expedite the licensing of exports; but Senator Glenn and others reply that the Nuclear Regulatory Committee (NRC) was given control of export licensing specifically so that decisions on safeguards would be made on technical rather than political grounds (as happened when NRC refused to allow to the export of nuclear fuel to the Tarapur nuclear plant in India, a decision later overruled by President Carter).

The nuclear industry is hoping for more sympathetic support for its international trade from the new Administration than from its predecessor. The Atomic Industry Forum points out that Secretary of State Alexander Haig has already called nuclear energy "imperative" for Western industrialized nations, and also notes that the appointment of ex-NRC commissioner Richard Kennedy as Under-Secretary of State for Management places "a nuclear supporter in Haig's inner circle" — even though the post has no nuclear responsibility. The industry would welcome a return to the "reliable supplier" doctrine as a device for limiting the misuse of nuclear technology which Mr Malone is expected to promote, but which critics claim has in the past proved ineffective in preventing nuclear exports claimed necessary for energy programmes being used for military purposes.

Ironically, the major threat may come from a very different direction, the Administration's desire to reduce public spending substantially. Among the agencies expecting major budget cuts is the Export-Import Bank, which provides loans to US companies to subsidize their exports, particularly to Third World countries. Virtually all US nuclear exports have been paid for with loans from this bank. If the source of the loans dries up — as seems possible — the nuclear industry will find itself facing a new set of hurdles to cross.

David Dickson

Science Adviser appointment revived

Washington

The appointment of a Presidential Science Advisor, on the back burner for most of the time since Inauguration Day, has become a live issue again. In the past few days, the name of a potential candidate for the job has been circulating. Earlier this week, it seemed certain that the new man would be formally nominated before the end of May.

The newest candidate is Dr George A. Keyworth, 41-year-old head of the physics division at the Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico, where he has worked for the past 13 years in nuclear weapons research, laser fusion and basic nuclear physics.

Dr Keyworth has already visited Washington to discuss the job with White House officials, but said last week that he has not formally been offered the position — although the offer was widely expected in Washington. He holds a bachelor's degree from Yale University in 1963, and a PhD in physics from Duke University in 1968.

Dr Keyworth is largely unknown in the scientific community; he seems to have had little experience in Washington, although he has served on the Department of Energy's Fusion Data Committee. Dr

Keyworth's name is said to have been put forward by the domestic policy staff within the White House, and he is said to have the enthusiastic support of Dr Edward Teller, one of Mr Reagan's advisers when he was governor of California.

The Reagan Administration has apparently had considerable difficulty in finding a candidate prepared to accept the post of science adviser and director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy, partly because of rumours that the role of the office is likely to be downgraded from its prominence during the Carter Administration under Dr Frank Press. Dr Keyworth says that he is in complete agreement with the new Administration's attitude towards science, and attempts to restore "American pre-eminence in industrial technology".

Dr Nunzio J. Palladino, dean of the College of Engineering at Pennsylvania State University, is expected to be named by Mr Reagan as the new chairman of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. Dr Palladino worked as an engineer with the Westinghouse Electric Company in Philadelphia before joining the National Laboratory at Oak Ridge.

David Dickson