

## Energy Insider by William Engdahl

### Some policy clues

*We interviewed a former energy aide to Dr. James Edwards, the Secretary-designate.*

President-elect Ronald Reagan made a surprise announcement last week when he announced his choice of former South Carolina Governor James B. Edwards to become the next head of the multibillion-dollar Rube Goldberg monstrosity known as the Department of Energy. Because the former governor has spent the past two years in private practice as an oral surgeon, the most that the press could speculate was that this is a "signal" of Mr. Reagan's intent to severely curtail, if not dismantle, the controversial creation of Rand strategist and professed neo-Malthusian James Rodney Schlesinger.

Some knowledgeable people have expressed a certain anxiety that Edwards may enter Washington like some latter-day Atilla the Hun and dismantle vital programs along with the clearly negative ones such as solar and various regulatory nightmares. While this may be possible, a recent talk I had with someone who had worked closely with Governor Edwards during his tenure should shed further light on Reagan's choice.

Robert Hirsch was director of the South Carolina Office of Energy under Edwards and the governor's executive assistant for energy research. His remarks show the former governor to have been one of the more far-sighted of our public officials during the 1974-79 period in which he served.

I asked Hirsch what major energy issues he dealt with under Edwards: "The state of South Carolina is completely energy-dependent, and we generated electric energy with nuclear power." Hirsch added that nuclear power "was the salvation of our situation. Jim Edwards advocated nuclear energy as vital to the development of South Carolina and a logical source of energy."

As a result of Edward's commitment to nuclear power generation, the state built up one of the nation's most impressive nuclear power complexes and a large energy base on which to attract large industry into an economically growing region. By the time Edwards left office in 1978, nuclear power generated over 50 percent of the state's electric power, an impressive record to say the least, in the face of doubling world oil prices.

Hirsch emphasized that Edwards used his office as governor to go to the population and "take every opportunity to speak for and tone down fears about nuclear energy." Under Edwards, the state created a strong Nuclear Advisory Council which brought in some of the best people from across the country to advise on the state's nuclear development program. It was under Edward's tenure that General Atomic completed the nation's first nuclear fuel reprocessing facility at Barnwell, S.C. This was and is today the only rational method to

solve the so-called nuclear waste problem: as much as 96 percent of the spent fuel from reactors can be reprocessed into new fuel rods or breeder fuel and other valuable materials. Four years ago Mr. Carter dashed this program using the fraudulent argument that it created danger of weapons proliferation. Whether the years of R&D and millions of dollars of development for the Barnwell reprocessing plant can now be salvaged is unclear. Edwards did, however, as governor, appreciate a profound facet of national energy R&D enough to make it a national issue.

His understanding of the complexities of the nuclear issues won him the respect of his fellow governors and led to his being selected as chairman of the National Governors' Association's nuclear energy committee. He also established the basis for creation of a South Carolina Energy Research Institute, which was funded privately and headed up by one of the country's most respected nuclear safety authorities, Dr. Ben Rusche.

Clearly, Edwards will require extremely sophisticated advice to restore the nation to its proper policy of energy development as opposed to the energy restriction which has been the underlying philosophy that James Schlesinger, S. David Freeman, and the gaggle of Carter "energy" strategists used to shape the development of the nation's first cabinet-level energy department four years ago. We are encouraged by the discussion with Hirsch that the new designee will approach the problem with a far healthier approach than his two predecessors. It will be an uphill battle to salvage this nation's vital nuclear program from four years of malign neglect.