ED ESHLEMAN'S WASHINGTON REPORT

The energy questions facing Congress and the Nation are so complicated that any action pertaining to them becomes confusing. Recently I cast two votes regarding oil policy that I am going to try to explain in this column because each vote, in its own way, represented a fundamental problem in dealing with our energy crisis.

In the first vote cast, I opposed President Ford's plan to decontrol the price of oil. Though it has been my position that economics rather than rationing should be used to regulate petroleum consumption, the government should not get out of the picture altogether.

That point was driven home by the oil companies themselves with their arbitrary decision to raise gasoline prices just before the July 4th holiday. So long as they show little or no concern for the public interest in matters of economic judgment, those of us with a sworn obligation to represent the public interest must continue to exercise some control over petroleum pricing policies. Therefore, I voted to continue the controls on oil costs, although that does not mean there cannot or should not be adjustments to the price structure in the future.

The second vote was concerned with the Presidnet's veto of a congressional proposal to roll back oil prices. In this instance I voted to support the Presidnet's view that a roll back would be completely irresponsible. This view also represented the feeling of many others including newspapers of widely divergent views such as the Wall Street Journal and the Washington Post. The Post called the roll back plan "a disastrously bad idea".

Why? Chiefly because the end result would be no new production of American oil. A study done by one of the country's leading liberals, and one who certainly is not likely to be supporting the oil company position, revealed that a price of $12.73 a barrel is needed to procude new oil at a reasonable profit. Yet, the roll back price would have been five dollars below that floor. No one would gamble on oil production at a loss of five dollars on every barrel.

With no new domestic oil we would be foced to turn to the Arabs for our petroleum needs. We would announce to them that we have quit exploring for oil in the U.S., and by the end of 1976, we would be dependent on them for more than half our petroleum demand.

Then what would happen to the price? The oil producing nations have already announced they will be substantially increasing the world oil price this fall. If we became largely dependent on them for the fuel we must have, the price would continue to go up and up and we would have no control over the situation and no choice but to pay the going price.

Sure, there's plenty of oil around now if we continue to import more and more if it. But do we really want to subject ourselves to price blackmail, or even worse the blackmail or threatening a cut-off of supplies? No responsible legislation can propose that kind of alternative.

It's a tough issue. Price increases in oil will not be popular but are inevitable no matter what road we take. I'm going to continue my efforts of trying to make sure that it's oil production and not oil profits that we'll be buying. Because for all of the confusion and complications the chief issue is really rather simple - we must have energy independence.

Assistant secretary of agriculture named

Richard E Bell has been appointed assistant secretary of agriculture for international affairs and commodity programs, according to Paul H. Keeney Chairman of Berks County Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Committee.

Secretary of Agriculture Earl L. Butz administered the oath of office to the career official who joined the Department of Agriculture 16 years ago and who has seved as deputy assistant secretary of agriculture for internatinal affairs and commodity programs since June 1973.

Bell, 41, succeeds Clayton Yeutter of Lincoln, Neb., who resigned to become the President's deputy special trade representative.

Born January 7, 1934 in Clinton, Ill., Bell grew up on a corn-soybean-livestock farm in central Illinois. He joined the Department's Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) in 1959 after obtaining his B.S. (cum laude) and M S degrees in agricultural economics from the University of Illinios at Urbana.

Bell worked as an economic analyst on Soviet agriculture in FAS here until late 1961 when he was appointed assistant agricultural attache at the American embassy on Ottawa, Canada. He subsequently served as assistant agricultural attache at the American embassy in Brussels, Belgium and as agricultural attache at the American embassy in Dublin, Ireland. He returned here in 1968 to become chief of grain marketing operations for FAS. In 1970, he was appointed director of the Grain and Feed Division of FAS and served in this position until his appointment as deputy assistant secretary.

Earlier this year, he received the Distinguished Service Award, the Department's highest honor, for this leadership in international trade. In 1973, he received the Department's Superior Service award for his work in promoting wheat exports.

In his new post, Bell will direct the operations of the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service, the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation and the Foreign Agricultural Service.

He will also serve as a member of the board of directors of the Commodity Credit Corporation and the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation.