

STATEMENT EXPRESSING EL PASO NATURAL GAS COMPANY'S OFFICIAL POSITION CONCERNING THE STRAW VOTE CONDUCTED IN SUBLETTE COUNTY ON NOVEMBER 7 IN WHICH THE VOTERS OPPOSED THE WAGON WHEEL PROJECT FOR THE NUCLEAR STIMULATION OF NATURAL GAS IN THAT COUNTY BY A 4 TO 1 MARGIN--Read by Dr. Philip Randolph, EPNG at a press conference in Cheyenne Wyoming.

The Green River Basin of Western Wyoming contains extensive deposits of natural gas and the United States is desperately in need of natural gas to maintain our current quality of life, to increase employment, and to support the massive environmental cleanup underway in the nation. Wyoming can make a vital contribution to these constructive efforts through its untapped reservoirs of natural gas.

Under the name of Project Wagon Wheel, El Paso Natural Gas Company is presently conducting exhaustive environmental and other studies in Sublette County and surrounding area to obtain information to determine if nuclear stimulation of local natural gas reservoirs is feasible. El Paso has not made a decision as to whether it will ask approval of U.S. government authorities to conduct a test of nuclear detonations in Sublette County. Obviously, at this stage, no such detonations have been negotiated between El Paso Natural Gas Company and the United States Government.

A small group of people in Sublette County have distributed large amounts of misleading and erroneous information even before the current studies are concluded and have conducted a premature straw poll. Under these conditions we do not feel the poll accurately reflects the feeling that the citizens of Sublette County will have after consideration of factual and unbiased information.

Topic: El Paso's official position on the straw vote taken in Sublette County on the Wagon Wheel Question by the Wagon Wheel Information Committee on Nov. 7, 1972

PRESS CONFERENCE, NOV. 30, 1972 WITH DR. PHILIP RANDOLPH, EPNG, DURING WYOMING ASSOCIATION OF SOIL CONSERVATION DISTRICTS STATE MEETING AT THE HITCHING POST IN CHEYENNE, WYOMING.

Question: Dr. Randolph, I have a question. At the time of the general election people in the Pinedale area took a straw vote on how they reacted or how they felt about the Wagon Wheel Project and the results of that vote showed/they <sup>that</sup> is you reaction to that? opposed it by a 4 to 1 margin. What ~~do/you/think~~

Randolph: Where's Arnet? ~~Did/He~~ He get lost? (You want me to find him, Phil?) Yeah, uh, the reason I'm asking for Arnet is that was a question we knew would come up and so it had been exercised at the policy level of the company and a written response to inquiry had been developed. Joe's got it. I've got a copy that I can read.

Question: You mean today you're releasing a written response to that?

Randolph: Uh, well Joe's had one--this is the first time anybody asked for it.

Question: I think <sup>that it was quite clear</sup> ~~that you were ph/recept~~ (tape garbled) on record <sup>as stating that if</sup> the people of Sublette County <sup>did</sup> ~~opposed~~ <sup>to have</sup> project Wagon Wheel that you ~~would~~ uh, that they wouldn't have ~~the~~ <sup>Wagon Wheel.</sup> Project. It's according to a fact sheet that stated in the Rocky Mountain News that covered that. Does your statement cover that?

Randolph: Uh, I think, yeah, I didn't know whether that question would come up. I have a copy of that thing in my pocket. I can read it to you and Joe should have copies. "The Green River Basin of Western Wyoming contains extensive deposits of natural gas and the United States is desparately in need of natural gas to maintain our current quality of life, to increase employment, <sup>and</sup> /to support the massive environmental cleanup underway in the nation. Wyoming can make a vital contribution to these constructive efforts through its untapped reservoirs of natural gas. Under the name of Project Wagon Wheel, El Paso Natual Gas Company is presently conducting exhaustive environmental and other studies in Sublette County and surrounding area to obtain information to determine if nuclear stimulation of local natural gas reservoirs is feasible. El Paso has not ~~made~~ made a decision as to whether it will ask approval of U. S. government authorities to conduct a test of nuclear detonations in Sublette County.

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Question: I would like to ask this question. It seems to me that the company is really breaking faith with the people of Sublette County. If this shot were to take place in 1974 the best time that we probably could have gotten a straw vote together is during the last election. I won't ~~go into the~~ details on how this was carried out, but it was carried out in an immaculate fashion. In other words, every precaution was taken to see that this thing was completely unbiased. There was no hanky-panky. Now, you're quoted in the Rocky Mountain News as saying--well, it says here, "Dr. Philip Randolph, manager of the Nuclear Division of El Paso Natural Gas Company, told more than 1,000 persons here Saturday/that Project Wagon Wheel will be abandoned if an overwhelming number of local residents oppose the program." How much more proof can you have? In other words, in other words, <sup>how much,</sup> look at it from the point of view of the people of Sublette County--when can they get together another vote? How much time are you supposed to have and how much time are they supposed to give you? In other words, aren't you really breaking faith?

Randolph: I'll answer a question with a question. You, you've locked on the word abandon~~ed~~. What's your definition of abandon?

Question: Let's not play games. In other words

Randolph: But, but I, both sides are playing games

Question: You said one thing and you're backtracking. In other words, if you back track on issues like this, how can people in Sublette County have any faith in what you do, what you say, what you tell them? You're, you're completely,

you're directly contradicting yourself. In other words, almost, almost everybody in the county who voted expressed an opinion. You lost by a 4 to 1 margin.

Randolph: They expressed an opinion that

Question: We have had, we have had up there, you have had your chance to go up there to convince the people at more than one meeting, at least one major meeting in Big Piney, you've had a chance to convince them that you were right. You've been up there again and again all summer long trying to convince the people that they should accept this shot. I'm not going to take up any more time but I would like your answer. In other words, is the company breaking faith and where does the company stand?

Randolph: My answer is no. My answer is no for the simple reason that there has never been a decision to do a project. Now how can you abandon a decision that hadn't been made? The people have spoken on the basis of the information that was before them, and at the time the company has not made, has never said here is the design of a project. We're going to go out and fire these shots and we're formally proposing to do it. Studies seeking a practical means of getting that gas out of the ground will of course continue to the extent that nuclear stimulation involves features which are considered objectionable, to residents of the county we will of course continue to seek to understand those objections, seeking a practical means to get that gas out of the ground and try to design a means that removes those objections. This is why I ask what's your definition of abandon? Is your definition of abandon is abandon the leases and leave, no, we don't regard that as being a responsible action. We have been, all we have ever done, is seek something that might be practical. We're still seeking that. When there is something we believe is sufficiently practical to formally propose, then, AEC has already very clearly stated in response to questions from all of the Congressional delegation of Wyoming that the views of the residents of Wyoming, of Sublette

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of ~~Sublette~~ County, Wyoming will be clearly sought in public hearings conducted in Pinedale as formal government hearings based on that specific proposal, and that specific proposal doesn't exist yet. So, yes, when there's a project, the people will have the opportunity to express their views.

It's not necessary, it's certainly not true that the only mechanism people can express their <sup>views</sup> is a straw vote in conjunction with a national election.