

ON MX IN NEVADA AND UTAH

Pentagon Team Trying to Sell Plan Meets Resistance to Building Missile Sites in 'Desert'

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ELY, Nev., Jan. 15 — Having convinced President Carter of the need to build a mobile intercontinental missile, the Air Force has embarked on the more difficult task of selling the project to the Americans whose lives would be most affected by the new strategic weapon, the hard-bitten and fiercely independent residents of eastern Nevada and central Utah.

In the first of several town meetings that are scheduled to be held in the two states over the next three weeks, 900 citizens of Nevada's White Pine County filed into the Ely High School gymnasium last night to listen to a team of Air Force generals and Pentagon civilians make its case for the missile, known as the MX.

The team from Washington, headed by Antonia H. Chayes, the Air Force's Deputy Secretary, did not get to do all the talking, however, and after more than three hours of tough questions and sometimes emotional statements from the floor it was clear that the farmers, ranchers and miners of White Pine County had qualms about living with the MX.

Ecological Balance Cited

"What in Washington is considered just worthless desert for deploying the missiles is actually a delicate ecological balance which supports ranchers and herders," said Jeffrey Gardiner, speaking for the White Pine Farm Bureau. This view was echoed by several other farmers, including Gerry Smith, who said that "the wide open spaces are part of our lifestyle" and argued that along with the MX would come "more people, more crime and more pollution."

The missile, which the Air Force wants to begin deploying in 1986, would be designed to escape any Soviet nuclear attack by shuttling along a series of roads and periodically moving in and out of concrete shelters that could be used to launch the missile in time of war. After extensive studies last year, the Air Force, which wants to build 200 of the missiles, decided that 47 valleys in the arid and sparsely populated terrain of the Utah-Nevada "intermountain area" provided ideal sites for the \$33 billion project.

But, under law, the Air Force cannot deploy the missile until it has completed a statement on its environmental impact. In an attempt to head off future legal battles over the weapon, the Air Force is now trying to address the economic and ecological concerns created by the MX.

The concerns seem strong and widespread. Although Gov. Scott M. Matheson of Utah and Gov. Robert List of Nevada originally voiced support for the missiles, leaders in both states have since voiced second thoughts.

The program, one of the largest public works projects in American history, will require 100,000 military and civilian construction workers in the mid-1980's, creating new jobs and attracting new investment in both states. But local leaders fear the influx of new workers will place heavy demands on schools and police and fire departments that are already heavily burdened.

Effects on Town Schools

For example, in Ely, which has a population of 20,000, the Board of Education has estimated that in 1987 it may have to find space for 8,000 students in the town's schools, five times the current enrollment figure.

State and local leaders are equally concerned about the impact of the MX on land resources and water supplies. Almost the entire system is to be deployed on Federal property, but the Bureau of Land Management in Washington now permits farmers and ranchers almost complete access to the land. It is estimated that the MX, besides taking up land in one of the driest regions in the nation, will use as much water as does Carson City, Nev., a city of 55,000 people.

Controversy over the MX has been reinforced recently by a growing feeling in both Utah and Nevada that the Air force has not been entirely candid about its plans for the missile. After reports from Washington that the Air Force wanted to seek new legislation that would ease environmental requirements for building the systems, Governor Matheson and Governor List accused the Pentagon of a "lack of cooperation."

'Sagebrush Rebellion' Cited

Federal and local officials said that the MX controversy also reflected the wider "sagebrush rebellion" in Western politics, the new mood of assertiveness in dealings with Washington. The mood, they said, is based on the widely held view that Westerners for years have been exploited by the Federal Government on such volatile issues as water rights and the testing of nuclear arms.

Air Force leaders, such as Mrs. Chayes, have moved quickly to respond to the "rebellion." Before flying out here yesterday, she gave a \$1 million check to a Western regional commission to enable Utah and Nevada to carry out their own environmental studies of the MX. And last night the citizens of Ely were told that the Pentagon was prepared to pay local and state governments for the extra public services that the MX project would require, a bill that some Nevada officials put at \$1 billion.

On the touchy issues of land and water, Gen. Guy Hecker, the Air Force's chief lobbyist for the MX, also announced that the Pentagon was prepared to help farmers and ranchers find new grazing areas for their livestock and that Pentagon engineers were confident that by digging new wells the missile project would not diminish existing water supplies.

While this news was greeted by applause by some, others were openly skeptical.

General Hecker and other Air Force officials believe that the economic benefits of the MX will overcome local environmental reservations. They also think that patriotism aroused by recent events in Afghanistan and Iran will lead Westerners to accept the system.

But this was hardly the attitude of one Nevada official who, asking not to be identified, said about the MX: "Washington isn't going to listen to us. We're just victims."