

Conference committee

WASHINGTON — A Senate-House Conference Committee agreed on a Naval Petroleum Reserve bill that would transfer jurisdiction of Petroleum Reserve No. Four (Pet 4) on Alaska's North Slope from the Navy to the Department of Interior.

The bill agreed to in conference must now be approved by the full House and Senate before being sent to the President for his signature. Informed sources say final action is expected sometime this month.

Sen. Mike Gravel, D-Alaska, who has been pushing for such legislation since December of 1973, said he was pleased to learn of the committee's decision.

The bill would mandate a transfer by June 1, 1977. That date would give the Navy and Interior time to work out the necessary details of the transfer.

In addition to transferring jurisdiction of Pet. 4, the bill contains a provision for a socioeconomic study of the impact of exploration and possible development of oil and gas in the area.

Included in the bill is an authorization for the Department of Interior to appropriate any funds that might be necessary for "municipal services and facilities in communities located on or near the reserve."

The Secretary of the Interior would be authorized to appropriate those funds on the basis of need "as a direct result of the exploration and study activities authorized" by the bill.

A task force would be established under the direction of the Secretary of Interior to study and review the values and best uses of the public domain lands in Pet 4.

The task force, comprised of representatives from the state, members of the Arctic Slope Native community and various federal agencies, would be required to submit a report within three years. The study would take into account such values as subsistence lands for Natives, scenic, historical, recreational, fish and wildlife, wilderness and other purposes.

While approving the transfer of Pet 4, the committee agreed that the Navy should retain jurisdiction of the other three petroleum reserves and authorized the Secretary of the Navy to begin oil and gas production in those three areas.