Doubt arises over location of plant

By MARSHA SHULER
Capitol news bureau

The location of a $750 million uranium enrichment plant in Claiborne Parish will be a boon for the area's economy, but local residents should have the final say in the matter, Gov. Buddy Roemer said Monday.

Roemer said he strongly favored the plant "when it was my feeling that the local constituents wanted the jobs. The company comes with some history of due diligence and environmental soundness. But I have heard recently that some of my neighbors in that parish are unhappy."

Roemer said he will meet with opponents or their representatives to determine if a problem exists in locating the nation's first commercial uranium enrichment plant in the rural parish.

"If there is a problem I won't sit idly by. The plant should not come if there is an environmental hazard. But our information now is that it does not pose one," Roemer said. "If the voters of that district feel differently then I will take a different position."

Roemer said he believes the location of the plant on a 40-acre tract near Homer will mean jobs in an area of high unemployment. He also said it is a new industry "that has been proven in other countries."

"Ultimately, the neighborhood in which the plant goes will determine if the plant will go there. If the people are feeling threatened, intimidated or put off by the decision, then I will step back and sit down with them and review it."

U.S. Sen. J. Bennett Johnston, D-La., is a prime mover behind the project. Last month, Johnston persuaded the Senate to remove the requirement for full-scale, trial-like public hearings on the proposed licensing of the plant.

In June, Louisiana Energy Services, a new consortium, announced plans for the uranium enrichment plant. There would be 400 construction jobs and 200 permanent jobs.

The construction is scheduled to begin in 1992 and plant operations are set to start in 1996.

The consortium is Flour-Daniel, an international construction and engineering organization; Urenco (European Enrichment Group); and three U.S. electric utilities — Louisiana Power and Light, Duke Power Co. of Charlotte, N.C., and Graystone Corp., a subsidiary of a Minnesota power company.

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