THE KNICKERBOCKER NEWS
ALBANY, N. Y.
D. 69,251

MAR 19 1976

Hudson fisherman compensation weighed

Conflict board ruling on Reid stocks

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State Enviromental Commissioner Ogden Reid is expected to learn today whether or not the Public Disclosure Board will ask him to sell certain stocks he owns, because they could represent a conflict of interest.

The state board is scheduled to decide the question when it meets in New York City today, according to board director William Cabin. The Public Disclosure Board was established by Gov. Hugh L. Carey to review the finances and holdings of top-paid state employes, with an eye on possible conflicts of interest.

In a Thursday press conference, called to discuss topics from compensation for Hudson River commercial fishermen to a state report on chemical PCB pollution, Reid was asked about the inquiry into his stock holdings.

He said, "I am certain the matter can be resolved," and indicated there was little chance it would ultimately force him to either resign or sell all his stock.

Reid said he owns stock in a number of companies and that it was "proper" for the board to question him about those holdings because his Department of Environmental Conservation (EnCon) "has regulatory authority over virtually every business in the state."

He said when he was sworn in as commissioner he made "complete and full" disclosures of his holdings and finances.

Reid appeared before the board March 8 to answer questions about his shareholdings.

The commissioner said he may be asked to sell only stock in companies that might have significant dealings with EnCon, and be permitted to keep other stocks, simply disqualifying himself whenever those companies had a case before his department.

Touching on other subjects, Reid said his department will be coming up with a "specific" plan for hiring Hudson River commercial fishermen for an EnCon study of the river. Those fishermen have been prohibited by EnCon from fishing the Hudson because the river's fish are contaminated with toxic PCB chemicals.

He also said the department is "looking at" a bill that would authorize the state to compensate the fisherman for losses suffered because of the fishing ban. Reid said he did not yet know exactly how much that could cost. An EnCon attorney at the conference said the money might come from the federal rather than the state government, because PCB chemicals were dumped in the river under federal permits.

But Reid agreed with David Seymour, president of the Hudson River Fishermen, who said "the men don't want a dole. They would rather work on a Hudson River study project."

PCB pollution of the Hudson is attributed mainly to the General Electric Co., which discharges the chemicals into the river from its Hudson Falls and Fort Edward plants.

Reid said an EnCon study of PCB pollution in the state, scheduled to be released in April, will show that the "Hudson is the most polluted river in the state...possibly in the world." An EnCon official working on the study said the problem is particularly severe in Hudson waters above the Troy dam near the GE plants. Concentrations of PCBs in fish there have been as high as 500 to 1,300 parts per million. The federal limit is 5 parts per million.

But Reid added that EnCon was making "encouraging progress" in its private PCB negotiations with GE. Those talks include reclamation projects for the river.

The EnCon official said the PCB report will show "we've only begun to comprehend" the extent of PCB pollution in the state. And, Reid added, there is now "significant" evidence that the chemicals that cause cancer in laboratory animals, may be transported by air as well as water.

"That's the only explanation," he said, for the fact that PCB contaminated fish have been found in some pure state waters.

Reid said he will introduce legislation calling for a state toxic substance law that would require chemicals used in New York to be pre-tested for toxicity.

MONS 037138