



4. ENERGY: Nuclear revival plans continue in some states (*ClimateWire*, 03/21/2011)

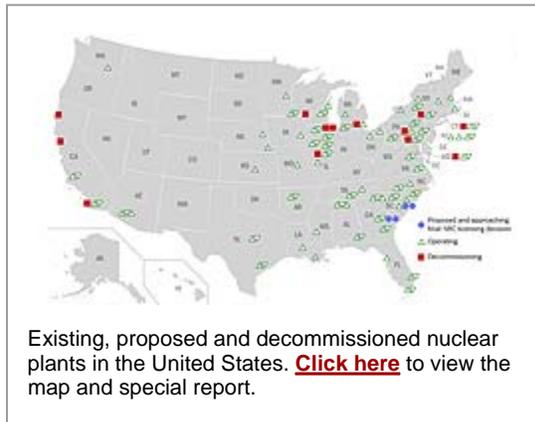
Christa Marshall, E&E reporter

Backers of pro-nuclear bills across the country are not turning away from support of the technology amid the ongoing crisis in Japan.

In Wisconsin, the new chairman of the state Assembly Committee on Energy and Utilities, Mark Honadel, told *ClimateWire* on Friday he still expects the governor to sign a bill later this year overturning that state's *de facto* ban on new nuclear plants. There will be a "breather" of a few months out of respect for the people of Japan, but legislation likely would move later in the year, he said.

"I just don't think it's fair that people start going to the media and spreading unfounded fears about nuclear," Honadel said. "It is a reliable energy source."

Nuclear Nation



A bill in Wisconsin is needed to prepare for future scenarios when the state needs new baseload power, he said. Honadel has significant power to move legislation as chairman of the committee, particularly as Republicans took over both the Wisconsin Legislature and the governorship in November (*ClimateWire*, Jan. 26).

Similarly, supporters of a bill that would overturn a 17-year nuclear moratorium in Minnesota are not changing their tone as Japanese workers struggle to restore electric power to the devastated reactors at the Fukushima nuclear site.

Legislation overturning the state's nuclear restrictions passed both chambers of the state Legislature earlier this year, but is sitting in a conference committee.

'Options open' in Minn.

Bride Seifert, manger of energy policy at the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce, predicted a conference version would emerge in a few weeks. Republicans took over the Minnesota Legislature, although state Gov. Mark Dayton (D) has expressed reservations about overturning the moratorium.

Like Honadel, Seifert said that Minnesota needs to plan for the future and should not be "tying the hands of utilities."

"It's concerning that all our eggs would be in the wind and gas basket if the state needed new baseload," she said. State utility Xcel Energy Inc. has said it doesn't see a need for new power plants in the next 15 years. But that could change, Seifert said.

Both the Minnesota and Wisconsin bills, along with other measures introduced in several states around the country, would not lead to immediate construction of nuclear plants, supporters say. Instead, they would allow developers to engage in planning for new reactors, rather than taking nuclear off the table entirely.

"This is about leaving our options open," Seifert said.

The lieutenant governor of Iowa made a parallel argument last week at a press conference, saying that the events in Japan should not hamper that state's plans to build a second nuclear power plant.

"It's a seven- to eight-year process in order to move toward nuclear production, but I think we need to continue to look at all alternative fuels and that's one of them," said Lt. Gov. Kim Reynolds (R).

Iowa and Utah weigh nuclear plans

Iowa's Legislature is considering a bill that would guarantee cost recovery for new nuclear reactors. Last week, MidAmerican Energy Co. CEO William Fehrman told state lawmakers at a hearing that nuclear needed to be an option for the future, considering that proposed rules by U.S. EPA could shutter some of the state's coal plants, according to a MidAmerican spokeswoman.

The governor of Utah, Gary Herbert (R), also introduced a 10-year energy plan Friday that said "future job growth in Utah is dependent on the growth of the nuclear power industry." He followed on the heels of other governors making public positive statements about nuclear power in the wake of Japan.

Missouri Gov. Jay Nixon (D), for example, told KMOX radio that he was not ready to abandon state plans to move forward with a second nuclear power plant.

Yet there has been some pushback at the state level against nuclear as well.

Also Friday, New York Attorney General Eric Schneiderman (D) sent a letter to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission requesting that it undertake an "immediate, full and open assessment" of all public health and safety risks posed by the Indian Point nuclear energy facility in Buchanan, N.Y.

The plant is being considered for relicensing, but Schneiderman said that possibility of seismic activity in the area should be considered in the renewal process. Federal regulations should be changed to consider how earthquakes could affect Indian Point, he said.



Eric T. Schneiderman, attorney general of New York.

N.Y., N.J. have reservations

The Japan crisis "serves as a graphic demonstration that nuclear power facilities in the United States may be vulnerable to seismic activity and experience catastrophic failures that compromise their ability to control and cool multiple reactors," he wrote.

In New Jersey, the state Department of Environmental Protection announced it was joining a federal lawsuit protesting new federal rules allowing spent nuclear fuel to be stored for 60 years, rather than 30.

"There needs to be a study about the safety of this," said spokesman Lawrence Ragonese. He said the decision was not a reaction to Japan, however.

Meanwhile, environmentalists in states considering pro-nuclear bills said legislators could face political pushback if they tried to overturn moratoriums, considering the events in Japan. There needs to be more of a go-slow attitude, in their view.

"The politics have changed tremendously in the past week," said Steve Morse, executive director of the Minnesota Environmental Council. He said he would not be surprised if legislators abandoned plans for the nuclear bill entirely.

In Wisconsin, some green groups also called for a timeout on any progression toward new nuclear legislation. The Wisconsin bill was already controversial because of the Department of Energy designating parts of the state as a prime spot for nuclear storage, said Keith Reopelle of Clean Wisconsin.

"Japan should cause the prospective authors of a bill to pause and reconsider," Reopelle said.

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