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The Nuclear Power 2021 Act

March 8th, 2011

Bingaman-Murkowski-Udall Bill Seeks To Show Utility of Small-Scale Nuclear Reactors

Sens. Jeff Bingaman (D-NM), Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) and Mark Udall (D-CO) today introduced legislation to direct the Department of Energy to develop innovative, low-cost nuclear reactors. [*The Nuclear Power 2021 Act \(S. 512\)*](#) proposes a program to design and certify small modular reactors (< 300 megawatts) which can be built and operated in combination with similar reactors at a single site.

The National Academy of Sciences and numerous other study groups have identified nuclear energy as a promising and essential technical option for meeting our future electricity needs while lowering our overall emissions of greenhouse gases.

Sen. Bingaman: *"Modular reactors make sense because they do not require as large up-front capital investment as conventional reactors. They will keep construction costs down at a time when the expense of building a traditional plant has become so high. I believe that it is appropriate for the Energy Department to work with utilities on the design and approval process for these reactors because nuclear power will play an important role in a carbon-constrained energy world."*

Sen. Murkowski: *"Small modular reactors have great potential to help meet our future domestic power needs in a flexible manner, both on and off the grid, as well as open market opportunities overseas. This legislation will help address existing challenges and overcome roadblocks by making the development, licensing, and deployment of small reactors a priority."*

Sen. Udall: *"I've long said there is no silver bullet to solve today's energy challenges; we're going to need silver buckshot, and nuclear energy should be at the table. Nuclear is among the few low-carbon, large-scale sources of baseload power that we know how to build today – and small reactors have the potential to make nuclear power more cost-efficient and secure. This bill will help bring small modular reactors to the market."*

Smaller reactors can be less capital intensive than the larger 1000-megawatt reactors currently being licensed by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. They also have the potential to be built in a modular and step-wise fashion. Under the Bingaman-Murkowski-Udall bill, the Federal effort would be cost-shared with the private sector and selected under a competitive merit review process that emphasizes efficiency, cost, safety and proliferation resistance.

Summary

The Nuclear Power 2021 Act authorizes the Secretary of Energy to work in a public-private partnership to:

§ Develop a standard design for two modular reactors, one of which will not be more than 50 megawatts;

- Obtain a design certification from the Nuclear Regulatory Commission for each design by 2018; and
- Obtain a combined operating license from the Commission by 2021.



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