



6. NUCLEAR CRISIS: Obama admin maintains its support for nuclear power *(Greenwire, 03/16/2011)*

Hannah Northey, E&E reporter

The Obama administration's top energy adviser said the federal government is firmly standing behind its plans to develop and continue licensing nuclear power in the United States, even as Japan struggles to contain fires and explosions at its earthquake-rattled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

Energy Secretary Steven Chu told a key House Energy and Commerce subpanel today that the administration is sticking by its fiscal 2012 budget request that includes \$36 billion in loan guarantees for new nuclear reactors, saying that otherwise, the technology will not be built.

The same goes for loan guarantees for renewable energy deployment, Chu said, because such initiatives will prompt private investments and become more competitive with time.

"What we want to do is look at what happened in Japan and say if there are these multiple events as was happening in Japan, a terrible earthquake and tsunami, and look to whether we would be vulnerable to a cascade of multiple events and how they might compromise safety," he said.

But while Republicans applauded the loan guarantee request for nuclear and the administration's support for nuclear power, they sharply questioned the government's 12 percent proposed increase for the Department of Energy in fiscal 2012, calling it "excessive" and flawed for cutting funds for fossil fuel subsidies. Rep. John Shimkus (R-Ill.), referring to the increase, said "obviously that's not going to happen."

Republican members also quizzed the secretary on how the United States can move forward with establishing a permanent repository for spent nuclear fuel, which was thrown into question after President Obama axed funding for the proposed Yucca Mountain, Nev., storage site and DOE pulled its application for the program.

"I am pleased that the DOE budget included additional funds for the nuclear loan guarantee program, but I do not support the administration's concurrent actions to shut down the statutorily mandated Yucca Mountain program," said Rep. Ed Whitfield (R-Ky.), the subcommittee's chairman.

Chu repeatedly said there are conflicting reports on the situation in Japan and that events there should not be confused with the need for a permanent repository in the United States. Chu said he did not want to pre-empt decisions the Blue Ribbon Commission would make on the best way to store spent nuclear fuel.

While Chu would not provide details on Yucca Mountain plans or what exact lessons the government might take away from the events in Japan, he said the administration's support for nuclear was apparent in the budget request, which includes the funding for development of small modular nuclear reactors and the loan guarantees.

In response, Democrats on the subpanel called for closer scrutiny of the country's nuclear fleet and criticized the impacts of the continuing resolution the House passed last month to fund the government for the rest of fiscal 2011, which they called an "all nuclear approach."

The measure cuts funding for renewable energy and energy efficiency programs by 35 percent, eliminates spending for home weatherization and threatens jobs, the Democrats said. The Republicans' measure, they added, undermines DOE programs for developing and deploying renewables while too heavily relying on nuclear power.

"All these projects and all these jobs are on the Republican chopping block," said Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.).

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