

NEI Nuclear Notes

Enabling the Nuclear Renaissance Act

By Mark Flanagan

July 22, 2010

Sen. George Voinovich (R-Ohio) this week introduced the Enabling the Nuclear Renaissance Act (S. 3618), which gathers into a single bill many nuclear energy provisions found in previously introduced legislation. Voinovich's legislation also includes provisions not found in other bills, proposing to establish several offices within DOE to handle nuclear energy issues and a new government corporation to assume responsibility from DOE for implementing the disposition of used nuclear fuel.

While it shares elements of the nuclear energy title in the Kerry-Lieberman American Power Act and several bills that encourage development of small reactors, Voinovich's legislation goes much further in reshaping the government's approach to nuclear energy. It provides funding and assistance to train workers, modifies the ways reactors are licensed and financed, and removes used nuclear fuel management from DOE.

Voinovich said the bill "intends to reignite the nuclear renaissance. This bill gives our companies and universities the tools to compete and win."

The legislation also includes nuclear energy in any national clean energy portfolio that is developed. Specifically, it allows nuclear companies to participate in a federal Renewable Electricity Standard (RES), which would place an obligation on utilities to produce a portion of their electricity from clean energy sources. Currently, only renewable energy generators qualify for the RES, though legislators have tried unsuccessfully to include nuclear energy.

The industry welcomed the new bill. Alex Flint, NEI's senior vice president for governmental affairs, said the legislation "recognizes

the role that nuclear energy should have in expanding our nation's non-emitting electricity generation while simultaneously creating tens of thousands of U.S. jobs, helping to achieve desired greenhouse gas reductions, and strengthening our energy security.”

The bill includes the following financial incentives:

- Following the lead of DOE's fiscal 2011 budget request and the American Power Act, Voinovich proposes \$54 billion in total loan guarantee authority. However, the bill goes further in proposing tax incentives for companies building new reactors and for manufacturers of parts used to construct a nuclear plant;
- Adopting ideas from the Nuclear Power 2021 Act (S.2812), which encourages the deployment of small reactors, the legislation directs DOE to develop a 50 percent cost-sharing program with industry and provides \$100 million a year for 10 years in government funding. Voinovich said that small reactors “represent an opportunity for the United States to regain global leadership” in nuclear technology.
- The bill authorizes funding for educational and training programs to create a trained nuclear work force, with \$5 million to DOE to support nuclear science and engineering in primary and secondary education and \$5 million to the Department of Labor to expand work force training to meet the demand for workers skilled in nuclear power plant construction and operation.
- The bill proposes the creation of several new offices to manage aspects of an expanded nuclear presence:
- An independent government corporation would assume the responsibilities currently held by DOE for managing used nuclear fuel. The legislation does not offer prescriptions for how used fuel should be handled, either via a repository or reprocessing or both.
- A proposed National Nuclear Energy Council as an independent forum within DOE for industry, Congress, government agencies, national laboratories and universities

would address significant issues facing the nuclear industry. The council would have 15 members, six of them from the nuclear energy industry.

- An Advisory Committee on Energy Park Development, also within DOE, would manage community initiatives to develop former DOE sites as energy parks.

Additionally, the legislation picks up several themes from other energy legislation that are designed to allow nuclear energy reactors to go on line sooner than the current licensing and regulatory regime allows. Specifically, the bill:

Eliminates NRC hearings for issues not raised in public meetings.

- Allows environmental impact statements used for early site permits to stand for combined operating licenses as well, eliminating a duplication of effort.
- Enhances regulatory authority. The bill extends the term of NRC commissioners to ensure the NRC is fully staffed in the event of delayed confirmation procedures.

The legislation has been referred to the Senate Committee on Finance.

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Date Retrieved:

July 25, 2010