

GUEST OPINION: Green energy policy should not include nuclear power



By Dr. Richard Clapp

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The long-awaited climate proposal crafted by Sens. John Kerry and Joseph Lieberman has finally landed on Capitol Hill. The proposal, though, is a massive nuclear bailout under the guise of an energy overhaul.

Near the top of the almost-1,000-page document is this statement: "It is the policy of the United States ... to facilitate the continued development and growth of a safe and clean nuclear energy industry." To achieve that, the proposal offers \$54 billion in loan guarantees, plus enormous tax breaks and other financial giveaways, and cuts short licensing and safety reviews of new reactors.

The nuclear power industry has skillfully and successfully painted itself green — an environmentally benign answer to reducing carbon emissions. The industry and many in Washington want us to believe that a new generation of nuclear reactors will solve the problems of climate change and allow us to live happily ever after.

That's a costly fairy tale.

Beneath the lofty promises of delivering a clean and safe energy supply by building a fleet of large new reactors are some very troubling truths — facts the nuclear industry and its advocates seem to have forgotten in their haste to marry climate change legislation to this modern-day nuclear bandwagon.

Consider the following:

- **Cost:** New nuclear reactors are extremely expensive, in the range of \$10 billion each.

Nobody knows exactly how much because no one has built a new reactor in this country for decades. But no reactor has ever been built on budget, or on time. Other forms of low-carbon generation are far cheaper and have the track record to prove it. For consumers, the cost differences will be evident in higher electric bills.

- **Risk:** Private investors want no part of underwriting the cost of nuclear power. So, U.S. taxpayers are being asked to foot the bill through at least \$54 billion in loan guarantees.

And, just in case construction schedules do go awry (as they always have in the past), taxpayers will provide "risk insurance" to the utilities for delays in licensing, up to \$500 million per reactor. The proposal expands this program so dramatically that taxpayers would even pay for idle worker time. Time: The time to tackle global warming is now. New nuclear reactors won't begin to produce a kilowatt of power for at least a decade, and probably longer. Non-polluting renewable alternatives — wind, geothermal, tidal power, solar — can join the energy mix quickly and move this nation off its high-carbon diet now.

- **Threats:** New nuclear reactors increase the danger of nuclear terrorism and nuclear proliferation. About 63,000 metric tons of highly radioactive spent fuel sits at reactor sites around the country, a target for terrorists. Conventional explosives directed at a spent fuel in these "pools" could wreak radiation and environmental havoc over a large area.

- **Health:** The nuclear fuel cycle exposes workers and communities to radiation from mining, milling, fuel fabrication, transportation, reactor operation, all the way to decommissioning and disposal. The biggest population-level exposure is actually to the uranium miners and millers and surrounding communities.

- **The "green" myth:** Nuclear power is not environmentally friendly. Nuclear power is not a renewable energy. Nuclear power produces large quantities of radioactive waste that remains deadly for hundreds of thousands of years, and there is no permanent solution for managing it. In addition, nuclear reactors consume large quantities of water. Many of the new reactors on the drawing boards are located in regions of the country experiencing severe water shortages. Why spend billions to build a reactor that may have to shut down during a drought?

We have waited far too long for a meaningful climate change proposal to surface in Washington. Yes, we need a "green" energy policy. Unfortunately, when it comes to nuclear power, the "green" in the Kerry-Lieberman proposal is largely taxpayer dollars subsidizing an industry that can't — or won't — stand on its own.

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Sometimes I wonder if our politicians are terrorists. I say this because no one in their right mind would build more nuclear power stations, knowing how dangerous they are. I sat in a meeting one day when the subject was Chernobyl. The person who was speaking laughed because they took the radiation and mixed it into the food supply. I was astonished. But, I asked myself, what's so funny, why is he laughing and so was everyone else in the room. Radiation kills. Mother Theresa said, 'The fruit of abortion is nuclear war'. That says it all to me!

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