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## What's Wrong with Nuclear Energy?

Anyone concerned about the dangers posed by rising levels of atmospheric carbon dioxide should embrace nuclear energy as a quick and efficient way to reduce greenhouse gases. Nuclear is clean, emits no carbon dioxide, and unlike wind, does not require hundreds of square miles to produce meaningful amounts of energy. Additionally, nuclear doesn't produce the mercury pollution emitted by coal fired plants.

Governor Doyle's Global Warming Task Force set goals to reduce Wisconsin's greenhouse gas emissions to 2005 levels by 2014, followed by a 22% reduction from those levels by 2022 and a 75% reduction by 2050. To meet these goals, the Task Force produced a 232 page document filled with an extensive list of expensive ideas, including piping our emitted carbon dioxide underground, adopting California car standards and joining a regional cap and trade program if a federal program is not enacted.

Given the money Governor Doyle and the Task Force propose we spend, one would think they'd jump at the opportunity to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 12 million tons annually - without hammering Wisconsin's economy. This is the estimated reduction we would achieve by simply doubling Wisconsin's production of electricity through the use of nuclear energy, according to the utility industry. Currently our state produces about 20% of our electricity with nuclear power.

The Global Warming Task Force is lukewarm to this idea, placing a long list of conditions in their report to be met before considering lifting Wisconsin's current nuclear moratorium. They conclude: "This recommendation is not a recommendation by the Task Force that a new nuclear plant be built." (Governor's Task Force on Global Warming: Final Report to Governor Jim Doyle, July 2008). Why is the Task Force so uneasy about nuclear power? Could it be because the Task Force members affiliated with utilities recognized that if they didn't go along they might have to deal with a resentful Doyle-appointed-Public Service Commission? Could it be that other members of the Task Force from academia and other agencies were hand picked because they, too, are aligned with Governor Doyle's position?

In the shadow of the 1979 Three Mile Island accident in Pennsylvania, Wisconsin enacted a nuclear moratorium in 1983. Last March, following nearly three decades of no other serious incidents in the U.S., and considering the progress on the construction of the Yucca Mountain nuclear waste facility in Nevada, the State Assembly passed a bill repealing our state's nuclear moratorium. Unfortunately, the State Senate refused to take up the bill and the moratorium is still in effect.

While some cite the high cost of constructing new plants, those costs do even out over time. According to the Nuclear Energy Institute, in 2007 nuclear plants in the U.S. produced electricity for 1.72 cents per kilowatt hour (kwh). That compares with 2.37 cents per kwh for coal plants and 6.75 cents per kwh at plants fueled by natural gas. Prices for coal and natural gas tend to be more volatile than uranium and could rise faster in the years ahead. In Wisconsin, there is room for another reactor to be installed at Point Beach, so we could increase our production of electricity with nuclear power without constructing an entire new plant.

Construction on a national waste repository at Yucca Mountain, Nevada, was progressing nicely, but has run into opposition from the Obama administration. It doesn't matter to Governor Doyle and his Task Force that Wisconsin rate payers have paid over \$350 million into the Nuclear Waste Fund (U.S. Department of Energy, December 2008). Yucca Mountain sits in one of the most geologically stable regions in the U.S., as well as one of the driest. Why doesn't Governor Doyle pressure the federal government to move the project along and put our money to use?

By not encouraging the expansion of nuclear energy, Governor Doyle's Task Force is saying that an industry with an excellent safety record in the U.S. is more dangerous than increasing levels of carbon dioxide. If that is true, then the dangers of carbon dioxide must be highly exaggerated.

Next week: Some revealing quotes about global warming. Access all of my reports online, at: <http://www.legis.state.wi.us/assembly/asm23/news/media.htm>.

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