Nuclear Power's Great Financial Hoax Can No Longer be Hidden or Ignored

By Colt Stewart

Thirty-eight years ago, the California Legislature passed the Nuclear Moratorium Act. Governor Jerry Brown signed it into law. The law, still on the books today, says that until the federal government certifies a "permanent" method of disposing of radioactive waste, no new nuclear reactors will be built in California. Those of us who worked on and defended this legislation knew the day would come when the ratepayers of California would have to pay the piper for decommissioning those reactors already under construction and we did not want to see the ratepayers stuck with the ultimate costs of decommissioning even more.

The Public Utilities Commission (PUC) knew it. The elected officials knew it. The ratepayer watchdog groups knew it. The utility companies knew it. The environmental groups knew it. The lawyers, engineers, and other staffers knew it.

Through "all events tariffs," the utilities financed the development and construction of their complex, dangerous, large-scale power generating stations in essence financially risk-free. Their argument was always, "We wish to assure the public a reliable source of low-cost electricity." Sounds reasonable, right? But they never factored in the decommissioning costs or the cost of permanently disposing of the long-term (like up to 1 million years) nuclear waste. In a shortsighted attempt to keep electric rates low, utility executives, PUC commissioners, ratepayer protection groups, engineers, and lawyers all put off attempting to identify those costs until such time — in the future — when they would become due.

Well that time is now.

The great hoax of nuclear power — an endless supply of cheap electricity — is now before us. There are still two gigantic unpaid bills coming due: for decommissioning the existing reactors that have outlived their useful lives, and for the long-term containment and abandonment of the radioactive waste which has overrun all the interim short-term storage solutions. These bills must be paid, whether by the ratepayers, the shareholders, the consumers, the insurance companies, the manufacturers, or all of the above.

— Colt Stewart of Palm Desert is a former Senior Energy Consultant to the California Assembly. He wrote this piece for **The Desert Sun.**

The Coalition for a Nuclear-Free Mississippi River, of which Nukewatch is a co-founder, inflated this mock radioactive waste cask beside an info table at the 2025 May Day Parade and celebration in Minneapolis, Minn. The group marched in the parade to raise awareness of the threat the Monticello reactor poses to the river and to drinking water for millions. Photo: Kelly Lundeen.

Irony Lives: "Clean Energy" Tax Credits Critical for Nuclear's Future

The nuclear power lobby has abandoned its former motto — "electricity too cheap to meter" — and replaced it with the fairy tale that nuclear reactors are "clean" and the "answer to climate change." The industry has spent so much money lobbying on Capitol Hill and on campaign financing, that Congress bought the whole charade and added nuclear reactor operations to its list of "clean energy" tax credit beneficiaries.

Now, with the Trump backlash against any acknowledgment of climate change or fossil fuel pollution, House Republicans are pushing drilling, mining, and burning and want to rescind all the Congressional "clean energy" tax credits.

Proving that irony is not dead, the myth-making nuclear industry is crying foul, as some of the tax credits identify and "incentivize" reactors as "clean energy assets" — the very fiction that the industry created.

Consequently, over 100 utilities, industry suppliers, and reactor developers, organized by the Nuclear Energy Institute, wrote to Congress April 30 demanding retention of the tax credits which keep alive dreams of new reactor construction.

The credits are essential to nuclear's economic future, the letter says, and are "critical to strengthening U.S. energy security" — meaning the industry cannot compete any more, and its CEO's have said so.

Speaking in New York City on Nov. 27, 2013, World Bank President Dr. Jim Yong Kim said, "The World Bank Group does not engage in providing support for nuclear power. … we don't do nuclear energy."

The U.S. Commission on the Prevention of Weapons of Mass Destruction Proliferation and Terrorism concluded in 2009 that governments should help stop nuclear weapons proliferation by "discouraging … the use of financial incentives in the promotion of civil nuclear power."

John Rowe, a former chairman and CEO of the nuclear power-heavy Exelon Corp. said "unequivocally," in March 2012, "that new [reactors] don't make any sense right now…. It just isn't economic, and it's not economic within a foreseeable time frame."

Even the former CEO of the Nuclear Energy Institute, Marvin Fertel, told *Scientific American* in 2012, "We won't build large numbers of new nuclear in the U.S. in the near term. Today, you ought to build gas." And Bill Johnson, CEO of Progress Energy, said in the same article, "Nuclear can't compete today." In 2011, Siemens Corp. declared that, following Germany's decision to close all 17 of its reactors by 2022 (all built by Siemens), the company would stop building new reactors anywhere in the world. "The chapter for us is closed," said Chief Executive Peter Löscher.

Calling new reactors "too expensive," Jon Wellinghoff, a former chair of the U.S. Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, said in 2009, "We may not need any, ever," adding that renewables "like wind, solar and biomass would be able to provide enough energy to meet base load capacity and future demand."

Jeffrey Immelt, CEO of the reactor engineering giant General Electric, said in 2010, "If you were a utility CEO and looked at your world today, you would just do gas and wind. ... You would never do nuclear. The economics are overwhelming."

Asked about Duke Power Florida's August 2013 decision to cancel new reactor plans, former Nuclear Regulatory Commission Chair Peter Bradford told the *Tampa Bay Times* that a nuclear construction boom, "was just this artificial gold rush. And yes, it does show the renaissance is dead." ***— JL***

Executive Order Could Force Cancellation of Sentinel Missile

An April 9 Executive Order from the White House puts the $200 billion+ long-range, land-based missile system dubbed "Sentinel" at risk of cancellation because the program is so far over budget.

The presidential EO directs the Secretary of Defense to complete a "comprehensive review" of all major military acquisition programs. Secretary Pete Hegseth has 90 days, or until early July, to finish the detailed review.

The massive Sentinel project is supposed to replace all 400 Minuteman III intercontinental missiles — along with 40 underground launch control centers and hundreds of miles of buried cables that connect them all to three major Air Force bases — which are now scattered across parts of Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, Nebraska, and North Dakota.

The EO declares that "any program more than 15 percent behind schedule …, 15 percent over cost …, unable to meet any key performance parameters, or unaligned with the Secretary of Defense's mission priorities, will be considered for potential cancellation."

A Government Accountability Office review found that the Sentinel's Air Force contractor Northrop Grumman Corp. was "struggling with staffing shortfalls, supply chain problems and clearance processing delays," according to the newsletter Defense One. One major cost-savings under consideration is the reuse of much of the underground cable systems connecting the silos, according to Montana's *The Missoulian*.

The source DefenseNews.org reported May 6, 2025, that while the Air Force had hoped to reuse existing Minuteman missile silos for the Sentinel, it "has concluded it will have to dig new silos." The system's cost instantly ballooned again.

In January 2024, the program blew past the 15% threshold set by the EO, inflating the proposed $77 billion program to $141 billion, or 81% over initial projections. Northrop Grumman CEO Kathy Warden said then that the overruns were due to construction costs and inflation.

After disclosure of the, shall we say, *skyrocketing* cost overruns, the Air Force fired the head of the program, Col. Charles Clegg.

This past February, the Air Force halted work on parts of the program which will only cause further delays and price hikes. Northrop's CEO Warden said on January 30 that the Air Force had "paused work on some small infrastructure efforts in the command and launch segment." Specifically, the service directed Warden "to suspend the design, testing, and construction work" on Sentinel's "Command and Launch Segment" which was then going on at test facilities in California and Utah.

Mackenzie Knight, a senior research associate for the Nuclear Information Project at the Federation of American Scientists blamed Northrop Grumman for underestimating the costs in order to win Congressional support, telling Defense One online, "At best it comes down to mismanagement and incompetence, and at worst, an intentional effort to downplay the complexities and challenges … to make it appear like it would be the cheaper, easier option." ***— Nukewatch staff***