

Testimony of Peter Bergel on HB 2410

Chair Lively and Members of the Committee:

My name is Peter Bergel. I live in Salem, and I am a constituent of Rep. Andersen's. In 1980 I was co-author and Campaign Director of Ballot Measure 7. When it passed with a majority vote of the people of Oregon - despite a 22-to-1 spending disadvantage - it put in place the provisions that this bill is now trying to get around. Those provisions are that an operating federal nuclear waste repository has to exist, and the people of Oregon have to vote their approval before more nuclear power can be sited in our state. Now, 45 years later, the industry still has no place to put the mess it makes.

The industry endlessly repeats that nuclear power is clean energy. However, saying so does not make it so and neither does the Oregon law that classified it as "non-emitting." If it were clean, the provisions of BM7 could be met, and the industry would not be bringing you this bill. Creating a mess that will last for quarter of a million years – far longer than recorded human history – and which nobody knows how to clean up cannot honestly be called "clean."

In the late 1970s, before Ballot Measure 7 stopped nuclear power in Oregon because it could not meet the measure's sensible provisions, the industry asserted that demand for power would grow in the Northwest at 7% per year. At that time, I participated in a study which predicted the growth rate would be half that. Both of us were wrong. The actual growth rate was on the order of 1%/year.

Today we are hearing the same story. We are going to need power and there is nowhere else to get it reliably other than nuclear. That was marketing hype then and it is marketing hype now. Recently we have been told that data centers,

with their insatiable appetite for AI, will need gargantuan amounts of power and that renewables cannot provide the “reliable” power that will be needed.

Now comes DeepSeek, a Chinese start-up that suggests AI can be developed using so much less energy that Eric Masanet, a sustainability researcher at UC Santa Barbara and a co-author of a recent energy forecast published by the Lawrence Berkley National Laboratory (where I once worked), said that although DeepSeek’s cost and energy efficiency are still being debated, “it’s really not a good idea” to look beyond the next two to three years. “The uncertainties” he said, “are just so large that, frankly, it’s kind of a futile exercise.”¹

Yet, this bill would have us clear the way for nuclear power to expand its radioactive mess, that will last essentially forever, on the chance that we might want to use nuclear power to run AI in 10-15 years and that renewables cannot handle the task. That only makes sense to those who profit from nuclear power.

Now let’s think about that word “reliable,” which crops up so often in the industry’s hype. Because nuclear power’s capacity factor - defined as the ratio of actual electrical energy output over a given period to the theoretical maximum electrical energy output over that period - is typically high, we are told that nuclear is “reliable power.” This does not take into account the “availability factor,” – defined as the duration it achieves production of electricity divided by the duration that it was planned to produce electricity. This is often much lower. The Trojan plant, for example, had so many technical problems that it was shut down for periods as long as 9 months at a time. Twenty-six of the 56 nuclear power plants in France – an exporter of nuclear power - shut down for varying periods in 2022, forcing France to import electricity. Many US plants have endured substantial downtimes for maintenance and repairs. All in all, nuclear

¹ Matteo Wong, “The False AI Energy Crisis,” <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2025/02/ai-energy-crisis-fossil-fuels/681653/>

power is certainly not the 24/7/365 energy solution we are being asked to believe in and bet on. Nuclear power, in practice, is not “reliable.”

Truly, nuclear power is a bad bet for Oregonians. This bill, which would let the nuclear camel’s nose under the edge of our state’s environmental tent, should be stopped right here in this committee.

I urge all of you to vote NO on HB 2410.

