March 5, 2025

Oregon State Legislature
Senate Committee on Energy and Environment
900 Court St. NE
Salem, OR 97301

RE: Oppose Senate Bill 215 – Repeals 1980 Ballot Measure Law.

Dear Chair Sollman, Vice Chair Brock Smith and members of the Committee,

I urge you to vote NO on Senate Bill 215. Before considering passing this bill you should Follow the Money and understand the Long-term Permanent Storage Repository Myth.

SB 215 will cause Oregon to waste public resources in favour of non-existent Small Modular Nuclear Reactors (SMNRs), riddled with the same limitations as their predecessors, and presenting poor value-for-money compared to the existing alternatives. A focus on SMNRs risks delaying the development of renewable energy technologies already available, and thereby prolonging our use of fossil fuels. Yet, despite the problems of SMNRs, currently the Oregon Legislature received a dozen nuclear energy bills. The question we must ask is why? One clue is to follow the money.

Follow the Money
Nuclear power today is among the costliest ways of generating electricity. Nevertheless, proponents of nuclear power explain we need it to supply the energy of data centers, Artificial Intelligence, and other industries. The costs of renewables and energy storage are going down rapidly, whereas nuclear construction costs are rising.[1] Yet the high cost of nuclear energy is welcomed by corporations and utilities because it offers the possibility of larger contracts and huge profits up front.

Nuclear reactors normally take 15 years or longer to come online. This will take too long to be an effective climate solution. But if you follow the money, you'll understand that procrastination is a good business strategy. The billionaires behind those industries and data centers, will get the tax breaks and incentives, which will add more money to their pockets while waiting for the nuclear reactors to come on-line, if they ever do. "Much of the money is made well before the facility is completed and before the first unit of electricity flows out of the plant."[2]

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[1] Lazard 2023 Levelized Cost Of Energy+
https://www.lazard.com/media/2ozoovyg/lazards-lcoeplus-april-2023.pdf
[2] *Nuclear Is Not The Solution: The folly of atomic power in the age of climate change*. M.V. Ramana, Published by Verso, 6 Meard St. London 2024, pg. 98.

This happened with the recent nukegate scandal of South Carolina's VC Summer nuclear energy plant where utility executives and shareholders made huge amounts of money at the expense of ratepayers. The VC Summer plant was never built, and ratepayers are still paying for it. Another recent nuclear energy plant is Georgia's Vogtle, costing $35 Billion. It was brought online in 2024, and is the most expensive power plant ever built. It is costing ratepayers $10,784 per kilowatt, compared to $900 – $1,500 per kilowatt for wind, solar, or natural gas.[3] Nuclear energy is an attractive investment for companies as long as the exorbitant costs are foisted on the pocketbooks of the public, and the risks are socialized. The profits, not the risks, accrue to the companies.

Long-term Permanent Storage Repository Myth

Nuclear energy corporation's accrue private profits but the cost of storing the waste is not included.[4] SB 15 will repeal the requirement that there be a licensed repository for the disposal of high-level radioactive waste before a plant site certificate may be issued. So, repealing this requirement makes sense because waste is not included in the cost, and a long term permanent repository is politically and probably physically not feasible.

Billions of taxpayer dollars have been spent in the more than 40 years since Measure 7 passed, and there still is no federally licensed high level nuclear waste repository. So any nuclear power plant that gets built and operates will become the de facto permanent site for the toxic waste. For example the shortly operated and now long closed Trojan nuclear power plant is storing 379 tons of highly radioactive nuclear waste. But do we want to make more of these de facto storage sites?

Further, no one knows whether humans can successfully store toxic radioactive waste for the needed quarter of a million years in a national repository. We are already struggling to "store" waste produced during the 1950s: Hanford has 56 million gallons of radioactive waste held in underground tanks with 3 tanks leaking toxic, radioactive waste into the soil.[5] Future generations will inherit the waste and derive no benefit. Therefore, nuclear waste is a dangerous problem with no solution and we should not produce more.

In February, Wyoming turned away from a proposed microreactor manufacturing industry and temporary waste storage. They turned away from it for the same reason Oregonians turned away from nuclear power through Measure 7. In Wyoming, the nuclear energy company Radiant wanted to "temporarily" store the spent, radioactive nuclear fuel at the manufacturing site until it can be shipped to a permanent storage repository, somewhere in the United States. Wyoming legislators

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[3] Plant Vogtle: The True Cost of Nuclear Power in the United States, https://www.nonukesyall.org/pdfs/Truth%20about%20Vogtle%20report%20May%2030%20release.pdf ; Ratepayers First: The Economic Case Against Nuclear's Data Center Dreams, https://www.powermag.com/blog/ratepayers-first-the-economic-case-against-nuclears-data-center-dreams/

[4] The scams and profiteering by nuclear energy promoters are well covered in the book *Nuclear Is Not The Solution: The folly of atomic power in the age of climate change*. M.V. Ramana, Published by Verso, 6 Meard St. London 2024, pg. 98.

[5] https://ecology.wa.gov/waste-toxics/nuclear-waste/hanford-cleanup/leaking-tanks

voted no because the U.S. does not have a waste repository, along with concerns about the safety of storing radioactive waste materials

A strong nuclear energy lobby hopes to pass SB 215, despite all of the problems, and explaining that nuclear energy can work hand-in-hand with renewables, it is becoming increasingly clear that nuclear power acts as a significant hurdle to the roll-out of renewables and fossil fuel phase-out. Therefore, please vote NO on SB 215.

Sincerely,

Debra Higbee