

Submitter: Peter Bergel
On Behalf Of: Oregon PeaceWorks
Committee: Senate Committee On Energy and Environment
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB216

Testimony of Peter Bergel on SB 215 and 216

Chair Sollman, Vice-Chair Smith and Members of the Committee:

My name is Peter Bergel. I live in Salem. In 1980 I was co-author and Campaign Director of Ballot Measure 7, which passed despite a 22-to-1 spending disadvantage. As politicians, you know how remarkable that is.

Clean Power

The industry endlessly repeats that nuclear power is clean energy. However, saying so does not make it so. Creating a mess that will last quarter of a million years – far longer than recorded human history – and which nobody knows how to clean up cannot honestly be called “clean.”

Need for Power

In the late 1970s 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.

In the 70s we were often assured by the industry that demand for electricity is not price-elastic, that is, it is needed regardless of how much it costs. The drop in demand as the price went up proved it definitely is price-elastic. As the NuScale/UAMPS failure makes clear, price elasticity is still alive and well today. UAMPS was interested in Small Modular Nuclear Reactors when they believed the cost would be competitive. When they saw that the cost was much higher, its demand evaporated and the project collapsed. Nuclear power today is the most expensive way to produce energy and should be abandoned for that reason alone.

Today we are hearing the same story: we are going to need power and there is nowhere else to get it other than nuclear. That was marketing hype then and it is marketing hype now. The claim that data centers will need nuclear to satiate their appetite for power is now called in question by DeepSeek, a Chinese start-up that suggests AI can be developed using dramatically less energy.

Reliable Power

Nuclear power is often called “reliable” by its supporters 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. However, this does not consider 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 – usually 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, repairs and other factors. Thus, nuclear power is not the 24/7/365 energy solution we are being asked to believe in and bet on. In practice, it is not “reliable.”

Nuclear power is a bad bet for Oregonians, no matter what other states decide. That is why Oregon voters passed Ballot Measure 7. These bills should be stopped right here in this committee, so I urge all of you to vote NO on both SB 215 and SB 216.