

# Testimony on Senate Bill 216

Chair Sollman, Vice Chair Smith, and Committee Members,

I'm Dirk Dunning, a retired professional engineer with 25 years at the Oregon Department of Energy overseeing Hanford cleanup and nuclear policy. I speak today in strong opposition to Senate Bill 216.

## SB 216 Undermines Democratic Decision-Making

In 1980, Oregon voters established clear requirements before nuclear power facilities could be sited in our state:

- A permanent high-level nuclear waste repository must be in operation
- The people of Oregon must approve any nuclear facility through a public vote

SB 216 seeks to completely override both of these requirements, effectively nullifying a direct democratic decision made by Oregonians. This represents an extraordinary dismissal of voter intent on an issue of significant public concern.

## The Waste Repository Requirement Remains Sound Policy

The requirement for an operational waste repository before siting nuclear facilities was and remains prudent policy:

- After more than 60 years of commercial nuclear power, no permanent high-level waste repository exists in the United States
- Yucca Mountain has been effectively abandoned after billions of dollars spent
- Consent-based siting efforts continue to face significant challenges
- Temporary storage continues to accumulate at reactor sites nationwide
- SMRs would generate additional waste requiring long-term management

## Technical and Economic Realities Further Caution Against SMRs

Beyond disregarding voter intent, SB 216 proposes to fast-track technologies facing significant challenges:

1. **Economic Viability:** SMRs require massive upfront capital with 8-10+ year construction timelines and face high likelihood of becoming stranded assets. Private investors increasingly view these projects as financially untenable, shifting risks to ratepayers and taxpayers.

2. **Rapidly Advancing Alternatives:** Fusion energy is approaching commercial viability within this decade. Companies like Helion, Commonwealth Fusion Systems, and TAE Technologies are demonstrating rapid progress that would make SMRs obsolete before completion.
3. **Climate Timeline Mismatch:** SMRs cannot address our immediate climate crisis. Their lengthy licensing and construction timeline makes them ineffective for timely climate action compared to renewables with continuously declining costs.
4. **Security Vulnerabilities:** Modern warfare has demonstrated how drone swarms and other emerging threats create new vulnerabilities for nuclear facilities that require perfect security over 60+ year lifespans.

## Recommendation

I strongly urge the committee to reject SB 216 on the grounds that it:

- Directly contravenes the expressed will of Oregon voters
- Removes prudent safeguards without addressing the underlying concerns
- Proposes to bypass democratic processes for technologies facing significant viability challenges
- Fails to consider Oregon's energy needs in the context of rapidly evolving alternatives

At minimum, any reconsideration of Oregon's nuclear siting requirements should follow, not bypass, the voter referral process established in 1980.

Respectfully submitted,

Dirk Dunning