



The Oregon Conservancy Foundation

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Before the Senate Committee on Energy and Environment

Testimony of Cathryn Chudy Oregon Conservancy Foundation March 5, 2025

Chair Sollman, Vice Chair Smith, members of the Committee and the public, my name is Cathryn Chudy and I am a Board Member of the Oregon Conservancy Foundation (OCF). I am testifying in opposition to SB 215 and SB 216.

It is disheartening that the ballot measure law that I helped pass 45 years ago is again being challenged and that our representatives are being asked by a combination of pro-nuclear industry and legislative sponsors of these measures to act as though the protections we set in place in 1980, are no longer valid. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Four plus decades later and we still do not have a permanent federal repository for the toxic high-level nuclear waste produced by retired and currently operating nuclear reactors in the United States, much less than from Small Modular Nuclear Reactors (SMNR's) that have not yet moved beyond the design stage. Based on all evidence, SMNR's remain years away and too expensive to be cost effective for Oregon's utilities and ratepayers. There is simply no safe, healthy, or economically viable reason to add more toxic waste to what is still sitting in casks at the failed Trojan nuclear plant next to the Columbia River. Any such waste generated by future reactors will only add to this expensive burden.

Information presented by pro-nuclear advocates misleads, minimizes or omits the risks, harms and prohibitive costs of nuclear reactors. The truth about these problems should be enough to eliminate nuclear power, even in the form of proposed Small Modular Reactors, from being considered as a viable energy resource for Oregon.

Nuclear proponents say that we will be protected by rigorous oversight at the federal level. This defies common sense as agencies meant to protect us, including the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), are having their workforce reduced and their mission diluted to the degree that [regulatory capture](#) is now the order of the day and "streamlining" that oversight means simply getting rid of safety in the interest of speeding things up. This is not in the best interest of protecting the environment and the people of Oregon.

Nuclear boosterism pushes for a "bipartisan" buy-in to a pro-nuclear agenda that we cannot

afford to embrace here in Oregon. I ask that you keep these bills from advancing any further.

I offer you the following article "[The Truths They Won't Tell You](#)" that includes this statement:

Of all the dangers of reckless nuclear boosterism, the most insidious is disinformation concealing and denying nuclear's past, present and future harms while wildly exaggerating its benefits. These are the perennial tactics of the nuclear industry. They litter its history, and they're again getting traction today.

Please read the full article below:

[The truths they won't tell you](#)

Posted on March 1 by BeyondNuclearInternational

The nuclear industry deliberately hides its radiation dangers, write Cindy Folkers and Amanda M. Nichols.

Scientists have been arguing about the health risks from radiation since the end of the 19th century, when radioactivity was first discovered. Today, with electricity demand soaring and AI companies clamoring for their own nuclear power plants, from small modular reactor projects to giant new nuclear builds, that century-old argument is ongoing.

But now it's mostly a battle between scientists on the one hand and the nuclear industry, the politicians it lobbies and gullible media on the other.

Currently, scientists are being drowned out. The Biden administration proposed to triple U.S. nuclear capacity by 2050, and President Trump is perceived as favoring nuclear expansion as well. Despite reams of peer-reviewed studies and books showing radiation's harmful effects, there is persistent denialism that seems impervious to fact-checking.

It took until this century for the U.S. government to finally admit that radiation had killed workers at nuclear weapons plants. For Congress, compensating them remains politically radioactive: lawmakers [failed to reauthorize the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act](#) that expired in 2024. Media coverage increasingly and uncritically repeats the talking points of nuclear industry spokespeople, who preposterously claim you would have to stand next to nuclear waste for a year to get as much radiation as having an X-ray, or that eating a banana gives you as much radiation exposure as living next to a nuclear plant.

This is dangerous disinformation in a long line of dangerous disinformation.

After the U.S. dropped atomic bombs on Japan, the director of the Manhattan Project, Gen. Leslie R. Groves, debunked reports of radiation sickness as Japanese "propaganda." Later, when he had to admit its existence, Groves misled Congress and the public by saying it was "a very pleasant way to die."

Spreading such lies is bad enough. What is even worse is that the truth of the matter has been actively and deliberately suppressed.

Scientists who first dared to expose radiation's harms — cancer, birth defects, disproportionate impacts on females — [had their funding and data seized and suffered professional ostracism and vilification.](#)

Yet their early scientific findings were largely vindicated. It's now well established that exposure to ionizing radiation has adverse health impacts, affecting the heart, lungs, thyroid, brain and immune system, causing blood disorders, cataracts, malignant tumors, keloids and other chronic conditions. It wreaks genetic havoc that can result in cancer, organ dysfunction and immune and metabolic disorders. Children and pregnant women are [particularly vulnerable.](#)

It's also proven ionizing radiation [disproportionately impacts women and girls](#), with the youngest worst affected. Ethnicity and other factors beyond biological sex and age may be contributing or compounding factors. There is also a growing body of evidence that radiation has [transgenerational impacts.](#)

Meanwhile, regulators set dose limits for radiation exposure that fly in the face of the evidence. These limits purport to set a "safe" level of radiation exposure, ignoring radiation researchers who have long stressed [there is no such thing as a safe level](#), since any exposure can contribute to adverse health impacts.

In fact, nuclear technologies, including civilian power reactors, have poisoned large swaths of land — and not only the areas around Chernobyl and Fukushima, whose radioactive cesium contaminated Tokyo. The U.S. nuclear industry has left a [lasting legacy of radiation in our environment](#), including in our [water and food](#), which U.S. regulators are hardly able to effectively track, let alone remediate.

[Uranium mining](#) and nuclear weapons testing particularly and disproportionately affect Indigenous land and Native Americans, compounding the harms of colonization, exploitation and marginalization on already overburdened communities. Nuclear technologies have done and will continue to do long, slow violence, especially to the poor and marginalized, leaving long-lasting ecological, human-health and genetic impacts.

We seem unable to keep these inconvenient truths in our heads, the more so since well-financed nuclear lobbyists and their government targets have misdirected our attention by reframing nuclear power as key to fighting climate change.

This is a fallacy. There's actually plenty of evidence showing the opposite — that relying on nuclear power actually [makes climate change worse](#), and [undercuts the true climate solution](#) of renewables and efficiency. Even the Government Accountability Office [called out the Nuclear Regulatory Commission](#) for its nonsensical refusal to consider the growing dangers of operating nuclear plants amid climate change. But none of that has prevented countenancing [the myth of nuclear as a climate strategy and other big lies](#) about it.

Perhaps the biggest lies about nuclear stem from Eisenhower's 1953 "Atoms for Peace" speech, a carefully crafted bid to recast nuclear technology as peaceful after the atrocious 1945 Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings. Atoms for Peace promised to make electricity "too cheap to meter" and "make the deserts bloom," while deliberately concealing the truth that nuclear was utterly uncompetitive and not remotely economically viable as a power source. Civilian nuclear power was misdirection away from the real agenda of building nuclear power plants, which was to help supply the nuclear weapons complex, producing enriched plutonium as feedstocks for nuclear bombs in the burgeoning arms race.

Today, nuclear weapons are still the hidden agenda and secret rationale behind the otherwise nonsensical nuclear power industry. The resurgent nuclear arms race is the real reason why many tens of billions in federal subsidies ([\\$53.5 billion in the Inflation Reduction Act alone](#), plus billions more in state subsidies) are propping up the utterly uncompetitive nuclear power industry, and why many billions more of taxpayers' money is now getting thrown at corporations pushing chimerical "advanced" nuclear and uneconomical, dirty, failing small modular reactors (SMRs).

But some are pushing back, like Indigenous nations and public interest advocates in southwest Washington, where [Amazon is pushing to build SMRs](#) to power its AI business, heedless of their negative impacts and prohibitive costs.

Of all the dangers of [reckless nuclear boosterism](#), the most insidious is disinformation concealing and denying nuclear's past, present and future harms while wildly exaggerating its benefits. These are the perennial tactics of the nuclear industry. They litter its history, and they're again getting traction today.

But they can be countered with sunshine — both the kind that powers real renewables with which nuclear can't compete, and the kind that exposes its prevarications and lies with scientific evidence and public scrutiny.

Cindy Folkers is the radiation and health hazard specialist at the NGO Beyond Nuclear, and co-author with Ian Fairlie of the new book "[The Scientists Who Alerted Us to the Dangers of Radiation](#)." Amanda M. Nichols, Ph.D. is a postdoctoral research fellow at University of California Santa Barbara's Environmental Studies Program, and managing editor of the peer-reviewed Journal of Religion, Nature and Culture.

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