



Generation Atomic
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Dear Chair Sollman, Vice-Chair Brock-Smith, and Members of the Senate Committee on Energy and Environment,

We at Generation Atomic write to express our strong support for Senate Bill 215, which would repeal the requirement for voter approval and radioactive waste repository licensing before a nuclear power plant may be sited in Oregon. The passage of this bill would represent a critical step forward for Oregon's energy future.

Removing these longstanding barriers would better position Oregon to meet its clean energy goals. While the State has a rich history of hydroelectric power generation, abnormally dry weather and drought in recent years have [reduced](#) in-state hydroelectric generation by more than half in three of the past five years. At the same time, natural gas use has risen, and now fuels 38% of Oregon's electricity generation, a significant increase from a decade ago. Oregon's aim to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to [80 percent](#) below 1990 levels by 2050 will be extremely difficult without exploring all carbon-free energy options, including nuclear. As a state with significant energy needs, Oregon requires carbon-free energy solutions that maintain quality of life while protecting the environment.

We specifically support SB 215 over the alternative SB 216 because SB 215 preserves the requirement for voter approval before siting nuclear power plants in Oregon. We believe maintaining this democratic safeguard is crucial for ensuring public trust and acceptance of nuclear energy. By allowing Oregonians to have a direct voice in decisions about nuclear development in their state, this bill strikes the right balance between removing unnecessary technical barriers and respecting the importance of public engagement in energy policy decisions.

While a permanent federal repository for spent nuclear fuel should still be pursued, the absence of such a repository should not prevent the construction of new nuclear facilities. Commercial spent nuclear fuel has been safely stored at reactor sites for decades without incident. In fact, spent fuel from commercial nuclear power plants *has never harmed anyone*. Removing the repository requirement acknowledges the proven safety record of on-site spent fuel management while allowing progress toward federal storage solutions to continue in parallel with nuclear energy development.

Energy demand in Oregon is growing faster than anticipated, placing more stress on the already stretched grid. The [Western Electricity Coordinating Council](#) has found that new data centers are becoming an "emerging risk" to electrical grid reliability. Oregon's data center market is the fifth largest in the nation, and demand for electricity in the West is projected to increase approximately 17% by 2033—twice what was predicted the previous year. With the projection of more data centers and electricity-demanding infrastructure planned for Oregon's future, large-scale solutions are needed to meet this demand. Nuclear energy, with the highest capacity factor of any energy source, can help to accomplish this.

Since Oregon's nuclear restrictions were enacted in 1980, nuclear technologies have evolved significantly. Today's advanced reactor designs offer promising improvements, including enhanced safety features, reduced waste production, and improved economics compared to previous generations. Most advanced designs also incorporate passive safety systems that could automatically shut down without operator intervention or external power. These designs propose modular construction techniques that would allow reactors to be partially assembled in factories and completed on-site, potentially reducing construction time and mitigating the cost overruns that plagued earlier nuclear projects.

Recognizing that meeting ambitious climate goals requires all carbon-free energy sources, many states across the country, including Illinois, West Virginia, Kentucky, Wisconsin, Montana, and Illinois have recently moved to lift their own restrictions on new nuclear development. Oregon should join these forward-thinking states by updating its outdated nuclear regulations to reflect modern realities.

It is for these reasons that we encourage the passage of SB 215 out of the Senate Committee On Energy and Environment. This bill represents a timely opportunity for Oregon to explore how advanced nuclear technology can best help provide the reliable, carbon-free power needed to meet our state's 21st-century clean energy goals.

Sincerely,

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