

Key senator calls for 100 new reactors in 20 years

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OAK RIDGE, Tenn. - Tennessee Sen. Lamar Alexander called Wednesday for doubling the number of nuclear reactors nationwide, a potentially \$700 billion proposal that calls for building 100 more over 20 years.

"It is an aggressive goal, but with presidential leadership it could happen," the third-ranking Senate Republican told an economic and technology conference at the Y-12 nuclear weapons plant in Oak Ridge.

"I am convinced it should happen because conservation and nuclear power are the only real alternatives we have today to produce enough low-cost, reliable, clean energy to clean the air, deal with climate change and keep good jobs from going overseas."

Alexander said he would deliver that message next week speaking on the floor of the Senate, where he said all 40 Republicans and many Democrats support nuclear energy. He said he hopes President Barack Obama's administration would embrace his call under efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Obama's administration is considering a cap-and-trade program designed to reduce greenhouse gases and to require larger quantities of carbon-free energy production.

The country's 104 commercial nuclear reactors produce 20 percent of the nation's electricity, while most of its energy comes from carbon-producing coal. The last reactor to come online was the Tennessee Valley Authority's Watts Bar Unit 1 reactor in Spring City, Tenn., in 1996.

Steve Smith, director of the Southern Alliance for Clean Energy, called Alexander's proposal "reckless."

"Nuclear power is a problem, not a solution," Smith said. "New nuclear reactors are expensive, create significant water use and thermal pollution risks to our communities and produce radioactive waste that after 50 years we still have no long-term solution for."

Smith urged conservation and efficiency improvements instead, but Alexander said they would not be enough to blunt growing energy demand.

Alexander said he also backs renewable energy sources, notably solar power and biomass fuels, yet called those still too expensive and inefficient.

"Today there is a huge energy gap between the renewable electricity we would like to have and the reliable, low-cost electricity we must have," he said.

The Tennessee Valley Authority is spending \$2.5 billion to complete a second reactor in Spring City by 2013. Meanwhile, there are 17 proposals for 26 new reactors pending before the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

Knoxville-based TVA has two reactors among the proposed projects and is considering completing two others in north Alabama.

Alexander said he would increase federal loan guarantees now being offered for the first four reactors to as many as 12 to "jump start" the nuclear revival.

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