

Lawmakers sign off on pursuit of nuclear power

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Despite some concerns over cost effectiveness, safe storage and potential impact on Utah's water supplies, a majority of lawmakers endorsed a joint resolution expressing support for developing nuclear power in the state.

SJR16, sponsored by Sen. David Hinkins, R-Orangeville, passed the House Tuesday afternoon on a 56-17 vote, surviving several attacks to alter its language.

House sponsor Rep. Christine Watkins, D-Price, urged her colleagues to approve the resolution, saying such facilities are not built overnight and while electrical power may be affordable now, that may not always be the case.

"We need to look ahead at our energy demands and what is coming down the pike," she said. "For the legislature to wait until everything is perfect ... is foolish and lacks leadership."

Several lawmakers, however, had concerns about appropriate storage, the capital costs such a facility would someday require and the need to tap into renewable energy.

Rep. Phil Reisen, D-Salt Lake, hoped to amend the resolution to mandate such a development would happen only after a safe disposal site is developed.

"It's like a building a large outhouse without digging a hole first," he said.

Supporters said such disposal mechanisms are already in place and concerns are unwarranted. Renewable energy, one lawmaker stressed, is only intermittent energy and can't be counted on to solely meet long-term needs.

"The sun does not always shine and the wind does not always blow," Rep. Mike Noel, R-Kanab said.

The resolution now goes to the governor.