

Senate approves resolution supporting nuclear power

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The Senate on Wednesday approved a joint resolution expressing support for the development of new nuclear power sources in the state.

SJR16, sponsored by Sen. David Hinkins, R-Orangeville, also encourages the development of clean coal, wind, solar, geothermal and hydroelectric energy sources. The resolution will now go to the House for consideration.

Hinkins said nuclear and other types of power are becoming increasingly necessary to the state's economy as its population grows while at the same time regulations on the mining and burning of coal make it less and less feasible as an affordable energy source.

"We're going to need all that we can get," Hinkins said.

Sen. Ross Romero, D-Salt Lake, who voted against the resolution, said he disagreed with claims made in it that nuclear power was cost effective, viable and safe.

"I don't think it has been adequately proven that we reprocess or recycle spent fuel properly," Romero said.

Senate Minority Patricia Jones, D-Salt Lake, who also sponsored a resolution promoting development of alternative energy sources in the state this year, noted that her proposal had been criticized by lawmakers for containing language characterized as "special favors" for not including nuclear power.

"This resolution has that kind of language in it and then some," Jones said before voting against the proposal. "What is good for the goose is good for the gander."

Before throwing his support behind the resolution, Sen. John Valentine, R-Orem, wanted to make sure that it did not single out a specific nuclear power project for support — a reference to a controversial proposed nuclear power plant in Emery County that has been supported by some lawmakers in the past.

Hinkins assured Valentine that his proposal simply made nuclear energy "part of the mix" and did not favor any one project or any one type of energy development.

Sen. Kevin Van Tassell, R-Vernal, predicted nuclear power would become a "very viable option" as the cost of other types of energy continued to increase.

"I'm an energy guy," Van Tassell said. "I think we need to have all kinds."

Sen. Dennis Stowell, R-Parowan, called nuclear energy a "good solid resource" and told senators, "I have no fear of nuclear." Both Van Tassell and Stowell voted in favor of the resolution.

Sen. Chris Butters, R-West Jordan, pointed to the fact that France currently generates up to 90 percent of its energy needs from nuclear power — which prompted Sen. Scott McCoy, D-Salt Lake, to joke, "This resolution officially states that the state of Utah wants to be like the French."