

BENNETT SAYS U.S. NEEDS TO GET SERIOUS ABOUT NUCLEAR POWER

By [Lee Davidson](#)

Deseret News

Published: November 24, 2008

Sen. Bob Bennett, R-Utah, expects soon to become the ranking Republican on the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Energy and Water. So he just spent a week in Europe looking at its energy industries for lessons he can use here.

A key lesson he says he learned is that America will soon need to depend much more on nuclear energy if it is serious about reducing carbon emissions — which environmentalists want to help stop global warming.

And he says to do that, America will need to become serious about reprocessing and reusing nuclear waste.

His trip to England, France and Austria included looking at a reprocessing plant in France, where some waste is turned into uranium and plutonium for reuse in plants and the remaining waste is stored in vitrified glass containers.

"We walked through a room that was filled with all those rods. It was kind of a symbolic thing to show how safe it is. They don't have it stored in Yucca Mountain. They have it stored in a room in the plant," Bennett said. "They have a very, very different attitude, obviously, in France about all of this."

Bennett added that reprocessing in France reduces the final amount of waste to only about 4 percent of the volume created by nuclear plants in America. "Nuclear energy makes far more sense if you are going to do the reprocessing," he said.

"After you take the spent fuel rod out of a light water reactor of the kind we have in the United States, there's still an enormous amount of energy in it. That's why it's so radioactive. And you can't get that energy out unless you reprocess the fuel rod and then feed the uranium you get out of it and some of the plutonium back into the nuclear plant," he said.

Bennett said U.S. companies do not reprocess fuel because Jimmy Carter banned it, hoping that would prevent the extra plutonium it would have created from escalating the nuclear arms race.

"Ronald Reagan reversed the executive order that banned reprocessing. But by that time, frankly, it was too late because the industry had gone ahead on the assumption that there would be no reprocessing. The technology had gone overseas. The rest of the world engages in reprocessing, and America doesn't," Bennett said.

"If we're serious about nuclear energy, we're going to have to get into the reprocessing business," he said.

"If we are going to be serious about carbon emissions, we have to have a much larger nuclear component in our electric production," he said.

"Nuclear power provides about 20 percent of America's needs now," he added. "If you're going to get to the targets that people are setting around the world for carbon emissions ... there's no way you get there without significant increases in nuclear power. Solar and wind simply aren't big enough."

Bennett also toured industries seeking to produce renewable energy — including a power plant operated by the ocean tide — and carbon trading markets that cap and trade how many emissions industries may produce in Europe.

Bennett is currently the ranking Republican on the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, but hopes because of retirements of other more senior members to switch and instead oversee the energy and water subcommittee because of the importance of debates on energy.