

TransCanada's chief sees key role for nuclear power

By Robert Grattan

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Image 1 of 2

Russ Girling, president and CEO, TransCanada, left, Hirohide Hirai, director general, Agency for Natural Resources & Energy, METI, Japan, participate in the Infrastructure & Technology Plenary: The ... more Nuclear power might not have the cost benefit of natural gas plants or the high-tech cachet of renewable power, but the power source still has an important role to play, TransCanada Corp. CEO Russ Girling said Thursday.

Nuclear power is a source of steady electricity, he said, and can help ensure power grids' constant demands are meet.

"The fallacy out there is that all megawatts are created equal," Girling said, speaking on a panel at IHS Energy CERAWeek. "They all do different things. Renewables are going to have a limit. ... You need to be able to turn the lights on when the sun isn't shining."

TransCanada is best known in the U.S. for its Keystone XL pipeline, which would have carried Canadian crude oil across the border on its way to the refineries of the Gulf Coast. The project was denied a permit by the U.S. government.

But in Canada it is also a large power generator and mover of natural gas. TransCanada estimated it had an interest in 10,900 megawatts of electricity generation in North America at the end of 2014, enough to power 11 million homes.

Much of the company's nuclear generation comes from Ontario's Bruce Power plant, where eight reactors provided about one-third of the province's electricity last year. That fuel comes without carbon emissions, Girling said, which makes it an attractive source for the future.

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"Demand for energy is going to keep growing both here in North America and globally. At the same time, we've got this shift from a more carbon-intensive mix to a less carbon-intensive mix," he said.

Nuclear power also been an important source of power in Japan, said Hirohide Hirai, the director general of Japan's Agency for Natural Resources & Energy.

Hirai noted that nearly five years ago, the country was dealing with a nuclear disaster at the Fukushima nuclear plant. The aftermath of the disaster led Japan away from nuclear generation, and the country replaced the generation with fuels such as coal and natural gas - though Hirai noted there were temporary blackouts.

Japan has since restarted some of its nuclear plants. But Hirai said that not all nations have the option of pursuing nuclear generation in the first place.

"By nature, nuclear power need a massive investment," he said. "The sheer size of those investments makes it a bit difficult for any country to have nuclear power plants."