

## **Bennett: U.S. needs 100 more nuclear power plants**

**Jun 23 - McClatchy-Tribune Regional News - Thomas Burr The Salt Lake Tribune**

Sen. Bob Bennett says the path to a clean energy future isn't by capping and trading carbon emissions, but by building, building, building.

Bennett said Monday the nation needs to construct 100 new nuclear reactors by 2030 -- doubling the nation's current number of 104 plants -- if it is serious about slashing carbon emissions while still producing enough electricity to keep up with American needs.

Bennett also brought together three other Republican senators and pro-nuclear energy witnesses to argue for constructing new nuke plants.

"It's been my experience and my position...that one of the driving forces behind America's economic growth has been our access to cheap energy," Bennett said at a Republican-only hearing on energy development he organized. "If we're going to survive in the kind of economy we want, we need to have access to cheap energy."

That means, Bennett says, reviving the idea of building new nuclear reactors, a move the United States hasn't made since 1977. He wasn't alone in that thought.

"The president has said Iran can produce electricity through nuclear power, so why in the world should we not in the United States begin to pick up the technology that we invented," Sen. Lamar Alexander of Tennessee said.

"The future of energy is clean energy," said Sen. Jim Bunning of Kentucky, including, "building at least 100 new nuclear power plants in the next 20 to 25 years."

Sen. Roger Wicker, R-Miss., said he was stumped why anyone would oppose such a construction blitz.

"You'd think that all Americans can come together on a plan like that," Wicker said.

Of course, one reason even nuclear-industry officials raise is the lack of a solution to tens of thousands of tons of nuclear waste piling up at reactors across the country. The Obama administration has essentially killed the plan to store the waste under Yucca Mountain north of Las Vegas, and Congress has yet to decide what to do with the radioactive spent fuel now parked at nuclear plants.

A panel of experts, invited by the ad-hoc committee Bennett chaired Monday, dismissed nuclear-waste concerns.

"How many people are being hurt by waste? It is not occurring in the real world," said Ted Rockwell, a fellow at the American Nuclear Society and a member of the National Academy of Engineering.

Rockwell later joked that nuclear waste can stay safe in dry ceramic casks at nuclear plants as long as someone posts a sign that says, "Do not eat the ceramic."

"If you don't eat it, it's not going to hurt you," Rockwell said.

Nuclear waste opponents beg to differ.

"To propose 100 new nuclear reactors and ignore the waste issue is the height of irresponsibility," said Vanessa Pierce, executive director of the Healthy Environment Alliance of Utah. Nuclear waste is "dangerous, it's a terrorist target and it's an unsolved problem."

Bennett, who attempted to slip \$100 billion in loans for innovative clean energy solutions into the massive stimulus bill, which critics contended was a bailout for the nuclear industry, supports reprocessing waste. That process, which is used in France but not in the United States, is costly, and still leaves behind more potent nuclear refuse, Pierce says.

"The thing is, reprocessing doesn't get rid of all the nuclear waste," she said. "Reprocessing is not a cure-all."

Bennett hosted the hearing on Monday as an alternative to a Democratic attempt to pass laws that would limit the amount of carbon a company can produce. The plan also would launch a market on which to sell carbon-emission allotments, a move commonly called cap and trade.

Bennett says he opposes the current Democratic proposal.

"I have yet to see a cap-and-trade regime that makes any sense to me," Bennett said. "I won't say never but pretty close."

[tburr@sltrib.com](mailto:tburr@sltrib.com)

Copyright © 1996-2009 by CyberTech, Inc.