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## Carl Crimmins, David Olson: Nuclear power revisited: A viable alternative

Without new projects, energy needs won't be met

By CARL CRIMMINS and DAVID OLSON

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Minnesota is approaching a crossroads in its ability to provide a reliable supply of electricity at competitive prices. Additional nuclear power must remain an option to maintain economic vitality and quality of life. It is time to repeal this state's nuclear power moratorium. The 2009 Legislature made some headway on this front, but didn't finish the job. A proposal to remove the ban on additional nuclear power passed the Senate with a broad bipartisan majority but failed in the House. Still, 102 lawmakers -- a majority of the Legislature -- voted to repeal the gag rule that prevents regulators from even talking about expanding nuclear energy. Nonetheless, our state continues its steady march toward a potential energy crisis because some lawmakers remain fixated on the rear-view mirror. Minnesota and America need more energy. Especially worrisome is a projected 21 percent increase in electricity use by 2030. Conservation and efficiency,

though important, will not close the gap alone. Hundreds of power facilities need to be built, and nuclear energy should be at the top of the list.


Nuclear plants make sense for all the right reasons:

- They are large scale and among the heavy lifters in producing electricity. They currently supply about 20 percent of U.S. electricity.
- They are reliable and among the most efficient on the U.S. electricity grid.
- They are friendly to the environment. They supply nearly three-quarters of all carbon-free electricity in this nation. In 2008, Minnesota's two nuclear power plants produced nearly one-quarter of the state's electricity and prevented the emission of 42,300 tons of sulfur dioxide, a precursor to acid rain, and 13.6 million metric tons of carbon dioxide, a contributor to global warming.
- They are cost-competitive. Minnesota's nuclear plants are the most cost-effective sources of power that are available 24/7. New plants will undoubtedly be more expensive than existing ones, but as new nuclear technology evolves, their value will

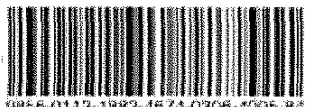
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become more evident -- even more so as federal policymakers begin to regulate carbon dioxide emissions.

- They are safe. Our nuclear power facilities are among the safest industrial plants in the United States.

- Finally, even without the moratorium, any new plant will already be obligated by state law to prove that it's more cost-effective than renewable energy and conservation, and that it is otherwise in the public interest.

Minnesota out of step

Proposed public policy at the federal level in itself points to increased reliance on nuclear generation of electricity. Witness passage by the U.S. House of the Clean Energy and Security Act of 2009. An analysis by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency estimates that the nation will have to build 180 new reactors as part of a comprehensive approach to meeting electricity needs while reducing greenhouse gases 83 percent by 2050.

Nuclear energy could be relied on to supply as much as one-third of U.S. electricity needs by 2030, according to a new report from the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

Detractors of nuclear power fear that its resurgence and the strength of nuclear energy's pricing advantage may sidetrack Minnesota from developing other alternative generation such as wind and solar energy. That simply won't occur under existing law. The state's renewable mandate requires that renewable electricity sources must account for 25 percent of every utility's retail sales by 2020. Xcel Energy is held to an even higher requirement at 30 percent.


Minnesota needs federal assistance, too, if it wants to expand nuclear energy. For example, federal policymakers should follow the example of France and other nations. The United States must proceed toward reprocessing used fuel to take advantage of the 90 percent of the energy that remains after uranium rods are used in a reactor. The U.S. government must also meet its decades-overdue commitment to remove spent nuclear fuel from commercial plant sites for permanent storage in the proposed repository at Yucca Mountain in Nevada or a comparable location.

Minnesotans still should feel secure. Nuclear plants at Monticello and Prairie Island in Red Wing -- like the rest of the industry -- have a history of safe, on-site storage for used

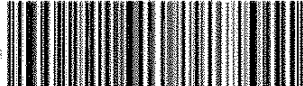
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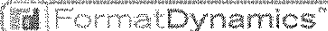
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nuclear fuel.

Recent public research shows that the public is ahead of some of our state lawmakers on this issue. A March 2009 national public opinion survey by Bisconti Research Inc. found that 70 percent of Americans would find it acceptable to build a new reactor at the nuclear plant nearest to where they live.

Key elected officials share similar opinions. President Obama, Gov. Tim Pawlenty and Sen. Amy Klobuchar, among others, consider nuclear energy to be a key part of the solution to climate change and energy independence. We agree.

Minnesota is out of step. The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission is reviewing permits for 26 new reactors in other states. The first advanced nuclear projects could come online as early as 2016, but nothing will happen in Minnesota as long as the moratorium is in place.

Sensible Energy Solutions for Minnesota, a nonprofit coalition consisting of labor, environmental and business leaders, believes it's imperative that all options are on the table to meet our future energy needs. With the support of Minnesotans everywhere, we will send a clear message to lawmakers in St.

Paul: Nuclear energy must be part of the solution in securing Minnesota's energy, environmental and economic future. Please visit [www.EnergySolutionsMN.org](http://www.EnergySolutionsMN.org) to join our effort.

Carl Crimmins is president of the Minnesota Pipe Trades Association. David Olson is president of the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce. Both are on the advisory board of Sensible Energy Solutions for Minnesota.

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