

## **Web-exclusive comment**

### *Nuclear is a muddy path to cleaner energy*

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#### Special to Globe and Mail Update

So, Ontario is back in the nuclear-power-building business. It's about time. Tough as the decision may have been for the government to accept the recommendations of the Ontario Power Authority and commit to a \$40-billion, nuclear-power program, getting a program launched might actually be even more difficult. After all, Ontario has been out of this business for almost two decades and unfortunately, significant challenges stand in the way of a successful "new build."

Consider these five hurdles, which Energy Minister Dwight Duncan will have to address quickly if he wants to see ground broken under his watch.

#### **Nuclear waste**

There has to be a disposal plan first. While nuclear power is emission-free, environmental groups quite fairly have concerns about what will happen to the radioactive byproducts that are generated. Currently, these are safely stored on site at the plants, on a temporary basis. Eventually, a permanent home will have to be found.

Options include:

permanent burial deep in the Canadian Shield (which has some people worried about the ecological effects);

temporary storage, in the hope science will eventually reveal a better use for the waste or a safer way to dispose of it (its accessibility makes some anti-terrorism experts nervous);

sending it back to Saskatchewan, where the uranium came from in the first place (which combines the worst of both worlds).

Whatever option is eventually selected by Canada's Nuclear Waste Management Organization, the cost and risk of transporting nuclear waste by truck or train through local communities to its final resting place will be high. A reasonable plan will have to be developed and accepted by all nuclear-powered provinces, and critical nearby communities will have to be convinced to stand down.

#### **Regulatory streamlining**

We need a new approval process. Using the old regime, it will take 10 to 12 years to develop a new nuclear plant - at least six years of lawyers and consultants getting permits and licences and navigating through a maze of government regulation and public consultation, and only four years of actual construction. This prospect is unacceptable. Ontarians need power now. A decade of redundant, repetitive and overlapping studies and approvals at each of the federal, provincial and municipal levels only serves to extend the current supply crunch, causing power prices to remain high until the new supply comes on line in 10 years, and adds millions of dollars of lawyers' and consultants' fees to the price of power - fees that are ultimately passed on to consumers.

All levels of government need to work together to establish a single approval process for the construction of power plants - perhaps a committee with representatives from all three levels -rather than having the developer submit its plans for review to one government, only to have to submit the same plans for the same review to another government later.

### **Site selection**

Everyone wants more power but no one wants the plant or the wires. We don't want urban power plants, we don't want urban wires connecting to rural power plants, but we demand a reliable supply of electricity for our cities. It is NIMBY gone nuts. The Minister will have to make difficult decisions in terms of where to site the new facility. No doubt, there will be some local backlash. For the good of the province, he will have to be firm in his decision.

### **Technology: A made-outside-Canada solution?**

All existing nuclear reactors in Canada use the CANDU technology developed by Atomic Energy of Canada Ltd., a company owned by Canadian taxpayers. While patriotism and the taxpayers' interest should be a factor, other competing technologies, including various models developed and used around the world by American, French and British companies, should not be discarded on the basis of national pride alone. This is a 40-year investment, and one of the most expensive infrastructure projects this nation will ever see. Ontario must examine all options, even foreign ones, to ensure it is getting the most reliable technology at the best value.

### **Cost: Let builders pay for overruns**

The last nuclear plant built in Ontario was years overdue and cost \$13-billion - more than 300 per cent more than the original \$4-billion budget. That whopping cost overrun contributed to the demise of Ontario Hydro, and is a direct cause of the "debt-retirement charge" consumers see on hydro bills each and every month - and will continue to see for at least 15 to 20 years. Ontario consumers have had to foot these bills because shifting the risk to the developer would have made no difference: The developer was a government monopoly owned by the people of Ontario. Now that we have a competitive electricity market with a variety of private generators, there is no reason to repeat past mistakes. The Minister must not allow Ontarians or their state-owned company, Ontario Power Generation, to pay the price for delays and unexpected costs.

Private investor-owned developers, construction companies, insurers and suppliers should be forced to assume the full risk of their failure to deliver on time and on budget, which means paying financial penalties to match the cost overruns. These international conglomerates will press hard for the province to assume some of the risk. As our representative in these negotiations, the Minister must be clear and firm that never again will the people of Ontario be left holding the bag for the failures of others.

Ontario is destined to see new nuclear power plants. If it wants to maintain a reliable, clean and inexpensive source of power, nuclear must be a part of the mix, together with gas, hydro, wind, and even coal.

In order to ensure that new plants are built quickly, efficiently and with minimal environmental and financial risk, however, the Minister of Energy has much to do. Let's hope the politics of a provincial election in 18 months will not stand in the way of his making the tough choices now.

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