

Advocating for nuclear power – the time is right

We live in strange times. Globally, populism is growing in response to a deep-seated anger with so-called liberal elites. Experts are no longer respected over louder voices that support peoples' strongly held views. There are no facts, only beliefs.

While most of the world continues to support the Paris agreement on climate, there is a reluctance by some to include nuclear power in the tool-kit to help meet this global challenge. There is wide spread belief that Germany is going down the right path as it eliminates nuclear from its mix and drastically increases its use of renewables. The only problem is that fossil fuel use is also increasing and emissions are not going down. This has not stopped other countries like France, which has one of the lowest emissions in Europe due to their nuclear fleet, setting out a policy to reduce reliance on nuclear. And now Korea seems to be going down the same path even though it would probably be hard to find another country that has benefited more through successfully implementing its nuclear program.

Does this mean that nuclear power is getting ready to move over and cede the future of energy supply to a fully renewable world? Not even close. With 58 units under construction there are now more new nuclear units coming into service each year than in the last 20 years. The UAE is nearing completion of its first units, a four-unit station as it becomes the newest entry into the nuclear club.

On the other hand, in the USA units are struggling to stay in service in de-regulated states and one of two new build projects has been stopped in the face of Westinghouse bankruptcy.

In the midst of all of this apparent chaos, there is a bright light. People are standing up saying – don't close my nuclear plants. People are recognizing that removing large low carbon emitting stations from the energy mix is no way to improve the climate. And most of all these people are ready and willing to fight. In the more than 35 years we have been in the nuclear industry I don't remember a time when there were strong vocal pro-nuclear NGOs. Yes, that's right – there are those who are not directly in the nuclear industry who have taken up the fight for nuclear. Not because they have any great passion for the technology, but because (as we discussed in May), they see nuclear plants as the ultimate solution to important issues. They want to save the environment. They want plentiful economic energy and they know that nuclear is an important part of the solution.



More vocal pro-nuclear NGOs today than we have had in 35 years

These organizations include a growing list of

environmentalists such as Environmental Progress, Energy for Humanity, Bright New World and Mothers for Nuclear – to name a few (this list is not meant to be exhaustive so if your organization is advocating for nuclear power, please comment with your name and a link). What they have in common is an understanding that nuclear power is not the evil that some think it is and that in fact it can help to make the world a better place. And of more importance they are willing to advocate for it.

The way I look at it, there are two types of advocacy. First there is the broader objective of securing public support; and then there is the more targeted advocacy that fights in the trenches to get political support for specific projects and actions. It is this second approach that I want to focus on here. These pro-nuclear groups consist of many who have spent their lives advocating for what they believe in; and therefore, bring a knowledge of how to influence decision makers and raise the profile of their cause. I have talked before about Meredith Angwin's wonderful book on how to be a nuclear advocate. It's a "how to" on getting out there and taking action. Or take the case of the nuclear bus – old fashion grass roots activism.

As was once explained to me, it is always easier to be against something than to be a supporter. It is anger about things that people believe is wrong in the world that ignites passion and brings them to the streets; supporters often stay at home and discuss these projects with their friends over a glass of wine. That is in part why there is so much passion about stopping the closure of existing nuclear plants. It is easier to be against closing them with the impacts to emissions and our communities than to argue in support of building something new. This is the beginning.

Because after all, it is a numbers game. 200 anti-project protesters can get a lot of press even though there may be 2000 who support the project but who stayed home. It's about

getting people out – politicians want to do the will of the people and they need to see this will. Supporting continued operations of a plant or even a new build is much easier if the preponderance of the people speaking at public hearings are in favour of the project.

The word we use today is “social license”. But what does this really mean? If it means securing significant local support for something then it is a laudable goal. However, most anti-nuclear (or anti-anything) groups take it to the extreme and mean that they have to agree with proceeding; which is something they will never do. As stated so eloquently by Rex Murphy in his piece on the efforts of the new NDP government desire to develop oil in Alberta – *“Notley [the Premier] missed the central point of social licence: its preconditions can never be met, and are not meant to be. It is an obstructionist tactic, designed to forestall and delay.”*

So why are countries ignoring the potential benefits of nuclear power as they strive to feed their energy hungry citizens with low carbon economic energy? There are many reasons as we and others have discussed before. We certainly believe that the overriding issue is fear. But we can also see that when people become supporters based on nuclear power being a solution to issues of importance to them, they do their homework and are able to resolve their fear. So we need to ask ourselves are people really that afraid, or is this also a remnant of the past where environmentally conscious groups were synonymous with being anti-nuclear? Are we seeing the last vestiges of a generation that fears nuclear power at all costs? Do we now have the opportunity to start to change the minds of a new generation that is willing to stand up and advocate for nuclear power? It may well be.

One thing is for sure, we all need to get out there and advocate for what we believe in. The time for talk is over – it is time to act. We need to organize and be sure to be out there every opportunity we can to support the decisions that

we believe are necessary to achieve our goals.

So,

- if you believe that climate change is a threat and that fossil fuel use is the main culprit; or
- if you believe that access to economic reliable energy is essential for progress and is critical to lift people out of poverty; or
- if you believe that high quality jobs and technological innovation is good for our communities and our economies; or
- if you want a future for your children and grandchildren with abundant plentiful reliable economic and low carbon energy to support them as they create their own future;

Then the answer is clear – and that answer is nuclear power.

This is a call to action. We all need to work together to advocate for what we know is right. We have been involved in this industry for close to 40 years and still are passionate supporters – because we truly believe we can leave the world a better place than when we started.