

South Carolina Nuclear Bailout: Legislation Backs Speculative, Ill-advised Nuclear Projects following VC Summer Debacle

Legislation Promotes Spent Fuel Reprocessing; Dominion Energy Electricity Bill Includes Hidden Charge of 5.6% for Failed Nuclear Reactor Construction Project

COLUMBIA, SC, US, March 26, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The sweeping energy legislation now being discussed by the South Carolina legislature contains overlooked giveaways to the nuclear industry by forcing electricity customers to pay for speculative or abandoned nuclear power projects.

The nuclear handouts in the bill mimic the rightfully maligned Baseload Review Act (BLRA), under which electricity customers were forced to pay in advance for SCE&G's terminated reactor construction project, according to a public interest watchdog that's tracked the failed V.C. Summer project since its inception.

The legislation, H. 5118 - the "South Carolina Ten Year Energy Transformation Act" - includes anti-customer provisions that allow a utility to recover costs for research and planning for a nuclear project, even if no application to the Public Service Commission (PSC) for their consideration has been made. The bill also allows for reimbursement for nuclear projects even if they are cancelled, if the Public Service Commission determines that such cost recovery from customers is "reasonable and prudent," the definition of which is undefined.

Tom Clements, director of the public-interest group Savannah River Site Watch and representative of the environmental group Friends of the Earth in that group's intervention between 2008 and 2019 before the PSC against the V.C. Summer project, said "Though the track



Aerial shot of Dominion Energy's V.C. Summer site north of Columbia, SC, with two terminated Westinghouse AP1000 reactors in foreground and single operating unit in background. Photo ©High Flyer 2017

record of new nuclear projects in South Carolina has been abysmal over the past two decades, special interests are at it again and want to stiff electricity customers with the costs of speculative and failed nuclear power projects. The nuclear provisions make the bill radioactive, and it should be rejected.”

The bill promotes so-called “small modular reactors” (SMRs) a type of reactor that only exists on paper and which could cost more and generate more nuclear waste per kilowatt hour than a larger reactor. The [speculative NuScale SMR](#), the first SMR project that was being loudly promoted (in Idaho), was cancelled in November 2023 when not enough investors could be found.



The Allied General Nuclear Services (AGNS) spent fuel reprocessing plant in Barnwell, South Carolina was constructed in the 1970s but never operated.

The legislation was amended in committee before being sent to the full House of

“

The bill before the South Carolina legislature includes unjustified giveaways to speculative nuclear projects, including "small modular reactors" and spent fuel reprocessing, and should be rejected.”

*Tom Clements, Director, SRS
Watch*

Representatives on March 21, to support "molten salt reactors," which are also speculative in nature. Further, the bill supports "spent nuclear fuel recycling facilities," a dirty and dangerous process that would remove weapon-usable plutonium from highly radioactive irradiated spent fuel and result in large amounts of high-level nuclear waste. "Reprocessing of spent fuel presents a host of nuclear waste and proliferation problems and it has no place in energy planning in South Carolina or the nation," said Clements, who has advocated against reprocessing since a reprocessing plant was proposed for Barnwell, South Carolina in the 1970s. That facility was constructed but never operated, thus sparing South Carolina the headache

of dealing with a large amount of highly radioactive liquid nuclear waste.

Of great concern in the bill is that the role of the Nuclear Advisory Council (NAC), a body which has repeatedly demonstrated poor judgment and willingness to back the nuclear industry over public concerns, is elevated. The NAC, which is directed to promote non-existent SMRs, failed to question the cost or schedule of the terminated V.C. Summer project - resulting in a loss of about \$10 billion on construction. And, for a decade the NAC gave unquestioning support to DOE's

plutonium fuel (MOX) project at the Savannah River Site, which was terminated in 2017 at a loss of \$5 billion on construction. The NAC was repeatedly warned in public comments about those trouble projects but failed to act, giving it a black eye and a damaged reputation of ignoring the facts and having poor judgement due to its backing problematic nuclear projects. To raise further doubts about the NAC and potential conflicts of interest, a SCE&G member on the body, Steven Byrne, was convicted of a felony for his role in the project and received prison time.



Savannah River Site Watch

SRS Watch, based in Columbia, South Carolina, monitors projects by the U.S. Department of Energy, with a focus on the Savannah River Site. The organization also tracks other nuclear issues in South Carolina.

To underscore that the BLRA has left an indelible negative mark on South Carolina and must not be repeated, Dominion Energy customers are now paying 5.6 % of the monthly bill on the terminated V.C. Summer project. That amount, not shown on the monthly bill, was revealed in a [document recently obtained from the S.C. Office of Regulatory Staff \(ORS\)](#) in response to a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request by Savannah River Site Watch. When Dominion took over SCANA in January 2019, the PSC allowed over \$2 billion to be collected from ratepayers over 20 years, so a nuclear hidden abandonment fee - which should be shown on the bill - will be collected for another 15 years.

“In the bill, the legislature is setting up electricity customers to bear the brunt of ill-conceived nuclear reactor projects and for that reason alone this ‘son of BLRA’ must be rejected,” added Clements.

###

Notes:

Link to H. 5118, see “Article 9” and onward for sections on the Nuclear Advisory Council and nuclear promotion and cost collection: https://www.scstatehouse.gov/sess125_2023-2024/bills/5118.htm

Link to Nuclear Advisory Council website - next meeting April 29 in Columbia (agenda not posted yet) - you are urged to attend to see how they function and how the public is mostly excluded: <https://admin.sc.gov/transparency/nuclear-advisory-council-nac>

Office of Regulatory Staff (ORS) document obtained by SRS Watch with current Baseload Review

Act "BLRA) monthly charge in December 2023 of 5.6%: <https://srswatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/SCEG-Rate-8-History-rcvd-Feb-24-2024.pdf> See small box at lower right labeled "Bill Makeup" for 5.6% amount. Dollar amount at the top of the small chart is for a "typical" customer's monthly bill, of which \$8.20 is for the terminated nuclear plant cost. BLRA charges for 2009 to 2017 are also shown in the document. And, since 2005, it is shown in another box at the bottom that 8.42% of the bill increases have been due to the BLRA. For this, customers have received no benefits. H. 5118 opens the door to a repeat of the BLRA nuclear reactor-construction fiasco.

Tom Clements

Savannah River Site Watch

+1 803-834-3084

[email us here](#)

Visit us on social media:

[Facebook](#)

[Twitter](#)

This press release can be viewed online at: <https://www.einpresswire.com/article/698915939>

EIN Presswire's priority is source transparency. We do not allow opaque clients, and our editors try to be careful about weeding out false and misleading content. As a user, if you see something we have missed, please do bring it to our attention. Your help is welcome. EIN Presswire, Everyone's Internet News Presswire™, tries to define some of the boundaries that are reasonable in today's world. Please see our Editorial Guidelines for more information.

© 1995-2024 Newsmatics Inc. All Right Reserved.