



Why Not Nuclear Power?

Posted by [Robert Rapier](#) on August 2, 2007 - 10:30am

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Tags: [barack obama](#), [hillary clinton](#), [john edwards](#), [nuclear energy](#) [[list all tags](#)]

A couple of days ago I was reading the [CNN/YouTube Democratic presidential debate transcript](#). Of course I am always interested to hear what the candidates have to say about energy. There were a lot of good comments, and the usual spattering of dumb comments. But I won't dissect them right now. What got me to thinking were the comments of John Edwards (on [Page 2](#)):

EDWARDS: Wind, solar, cellulose-based biofuels are the way we need to go. I do not favor nuclear power. We haven't built a nuclear power plant in decades in this country. There is a reason for that. The reason is it is extremely costly. It takes an enormous amount of time to get one planned, developed and built. And we still don't have a safe way to dispose of the nuclear waste. It is a huge problem for America over the long term.

I also don't believe we should liquefy coal. The last thing we need is another carbon-based fuel in America. We need to find fuels that are in fact renewable, clean, and will allow us to address directly the question that has been raised, which is the issue of global warming, which I believe is a crisis.

Following this, Barack Obama said that he favored including nuclear power in the mix, and Hillary Clinton said she was agnostic about nuclear power. She did play the "oil" card, which is to say that she thinks the solution to our energy problem is to take from oil and then let the government figure out how to spend that money on alternatives.

I have been accused occasionally of having various anti-nuclear views. This is amusing, given that I have never written anything negative about nuclear power. The main reason is that I am not well-versed in the pros and cons. My understanding is that the main pro is that nuclear can provide an abundant source of energy for quite some time. This is also a reason that I favor a transition to an electric infrastructure: We are going to run low on liquid fuels long before we run low on the ability to produce electricity.

As I understand it, the primary negative is still that we don't have a good solution for dealing with nuclear waste. Obviously, we can't just pile up waste indefinitely, and I am not sure how reactors around the world handle this problem. And of course historically there have been the occasional [Three Mile Island](#) and [Chernobyl](#), which ensures that nobody is going to want a nuclear reactor in their backyard.

My feeling is that we will desperately need nuclear energy in the not too distant future. But what

about the waste problem? How do other countries deal with the waste problem? I presume France, with all of their nuclear reactors, must have a solution that the population is comfortable with.

For an extremely negative view of nuclear power, see the recently published essay by anti-nuclear activist Rebecca Solnit:

[Reasons Not to Glow](#)

CNN also presents a negatively slanted view in a just-published article, but they do discuss the waste issue a bit:

[Going nuclear](#)

So which viewpoint is closest to the truth? Do the negatives outweigh the negatives of 1). Blackouts; and 2). Global Warming caused by coal-fired plants? Some people may not be aware of it, but all of the top point sources of CO₂ emissions are from coal-fired power plants. (I had a list, but can't find it. If someone knows where this information resides, please post the link).

I would like some people knowledgeable in this area to provide some input here. My own view is that we are going to need nuclear power in the mix. But it may take frequent blackouts before the public starts to accept the necessity.



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