

Lindquist: For state's sake, let project proceed

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Even dedicated environmentalists recognize nuclear energy's value as a carbon-free power source. U.S. Energy Secretary Steven Chu goes so far as to say the choice is between fossil fuels or nuclear power for the bulk of the nation's baseline power supply.

With several plants on the drawing boards, Texas cities are depending on nuclear power as a source of clean, cost-efficient electricity. In Austin, the City Council is examining whether to buy even more nuclear energy, which supplies a third of the city's power.

As Austin considers expanding its investment in nuclear energy, it should also focus on the safe, environmental disposal of waste. That is the solution offered by the Texas Low Level Radioactive Waste Disposal Compact Commission at its disposal site in West Texas.

After years of environmental review by the state, Waste Control Specialists is ready to begin construction of the low-level radioactive waste disposal facility for the Texas compact commission in Andrews County.

The process to license and adopt rules for the \$100 million project took almost seven years: five years of scrutiny, revision, public hearings and comments before the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality granted the disposal license in 2009 and nearly two years of review, public meetings and discussions of importation rules. That's not a rush.

The project, however, is facing a round of attacks from anti-nuclear groups who are trying to keep the site from providing a Texas solution to a national problem. Critics, exemplified by Karen Hadden in her recent column, argue there is not enough disposal capacity for the Texas compact members (Texas and Vermont), let alone remaining capacity to dispose of waste from generators outside the compact. But the numbers prove them wrong.

Vermont, Texas' partner in the Texas Compact, will have produced about 490,000 cubic feet of low-level waste from operations and decommissioning by 2032, when its lone nuclear reactor will likely be decommissioned. This amount has been confirmed by the operator and the state regulatory agency.

Texas, on the other hand, has newer and more efficient reactors, and it is estimated that the combined amount of waste for operations and decommissioning will be about 1.5 million cubic feet when these reactors are ready to be decommissioned. The latest estimates by the compact commission are that the Texas facility will have up to 1 million cubic feet of capacity for out-of-compact waste.

Much of the imported waste will be Class B and C waste, which will be disposed of at a premium price. The disposal of this waste will significantly lower the cost of disposal for compact generators, make the compact facility economically viable, protect jobs for Texans, and produce significant revenue to the state of Texas and Andrews County, who will each receive 5 percent of the gross revenues generated by disposal operations annually.

Critics also ignore the fact that 20 percent of all Texans — more than 5 million people — receive their electricity from non-Texas producers, including out-of-state nuclear utilities. Without establishing import rules, Texans could be disadvantaged because their nuclear utility generators would not have a site to dispose of their waste, which could increase the cost of the power they provide.

Opponents of nuclear power understand that, but they don't care. Their goal is to shut down nuclear energy in the U.S. by making sure the facility isn't economically viable.

That is the battle. But the radioactive material is already present in our cities, on our university campuses and in our hospitals. The Texas Compact Commission site offers a safe, logical, permanent solution to the problem.

Lindquist has served as CEO of Dallas-based Waste Control Specialists since 2007.