



Nuclear Power

A Bad Choice for Mississippi

The Green Party of Mississippi (www.greenpartyms.org) has spoken out for a future-oriented state energy policy that emphasizes conservation and the development of renewable energy sources. There are good reasons to build no new nuclear plants and to phase out nuclear power altogether.

Why We Oppose Nuclear Power

The Green Party is the party of personal responsibility and the party of future focus. Our actions on the personal level should reflect our care and concern for future generations. These perspectives form the foundation of our opposition to nuclear energy. We object to

- contamination of our environment by radioactive toxic waste
- government subsidies of an uncompetitive industry
- threats to public safety and national security

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Why Mississippi?

In the mid-1980s, the Richton salt dome in southeast Mississippi was proposed as a site for long-term storage of radioactive waste. Fortunately, our state resisted becoming a dumping ground for toxic waste. We took a look at the promises of jobs and said, "It's not worth it."

Today, the nuclear power industry has chosen Mississippi as a test case. If it can convince local residents to let it build a new nuclear reactor at Grand Gulf near Port Gibson, it will construct new reactors all over the country. Mississippi should not roll over and play dead for these or any other special interests.

Why Now?

Our economy depends absolutely on oil. Just as individual oil wells follow a natural curve of increasing production, peak, then decreasing production, world oil production is projected to peak in the immediate future. The risks of Peak Oil are not exactly due to the oil's "running out." At the peak, one-half of all the oil in the world will still be in the ground. But, demand will continue to rise, and the half that remains is the more difficult and expensive half to extract. Several studies, reviewed by Richard Heinberg (*The Party's Over*) and others, present a convincing case that no existing energy production technology, including nuclear, can fill appetites accustomed to cheap, energy-rich fossil fuels.

A Better Energy Future is Possible

Whereas technology has given us a way out of the problem, through energy conservation and renewable energy, we should ask if we really need nuclear power at all.

How much power could we save if all the lights in all state buildings were turned off when not in use? How much power could we save if we implemented a million small steps like that? We need generous tax credits to encourage conservation, including the purchase of fuel-efficient vehicles. Conservation is the first and most important step.

Instead of building a gigantic nuclear power plant to supply the power needs of a million people, why not make it easier for local communities, and individual homeowners, to install rooftop solar water heaters and photovoltaic cells? Investment in renewable energy is the second pillar of a Green energy policy for Mississippi.

Taxpayer dollars should be carefully used to encourage long-term local and community-based energy solutions, not to massively subsidize the nuclear power industry.

Nuclear power is neither clean, green, nor safe. It is the most biologically dangerous method to boil water to generate steam for the production of electricity.

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Our Specific Objections

The Nuclear Waste Problem

Whereas our scientists can split the atom but have not yet after 60 years devised a way to safely store radioactive waste, we should ask if it is morally right to create a vast amount of toxic materials. Where will they be stored?

Nuclear reactors produce waste that is both chemically toxic and highly radioactive. Some of the radioisotopes produced inside reactors do not naturally exist on Earth, and the human body is not equipped to deal with them. Ionizing radiation damages the cells in the human body, causing birth defects and cancer. Even today, with the world highly vested in nuclear power, we still don't know the effects of low levels of ionizing radiation. Nuclear waste has to be stored where it will not leak and where it will not be stolen for at least 10,000 years. That's about as long as civilization has existed on Earth.

Corporate Welfare is Bad Business

Whereas nuclear energy is too expensive to go it alone in the free market and must rely on government handouts, taxpayers should ask how much of the tab they are going to be asked to pay. The late political cartoonist George Fisher once called Grand Gulf the "Grand Gulp" for the massive taxpayer subsidies required to build and maintain the plant. Now,

those same ratepayers are being asked to foot the bill for a second Grand Gulf plant. Nuclear power plants are too expensive for power companies to build them without government handouts. Greens call these taxpayer dollars that get passed from Big Government to Big Business "corporate welfare." Our government lauds the free market, and we in the Green Party support free enterprise. But government should not slip tax money to companies to build nuclear power plants that are uneconomical in their own right.

Nuclear Accidents are Forever

Several radioactive releases and near-meltdowns have occurred in the US. Indeed, unintended consequences always happen. Oil refineries catch fire and burn. That's why you'll hear the nuclear industry talk about "cost-benefit analysis." The difference is radioactivity is forever. For all practical purposes, lands downstream and downwind of a major nuclear accident like Chernobyl will not be useable for generations. In Ukraine, cities remain uninhabited almost 20 years after the disaster. If such an event were to occur in Port Gibson, all the jobs and dollars brought there by the plant would be poor consolation for the loss of the place people call home.

Our government's preparation for and response to Hurricane Katrina calls into serious doubt its ability to plan for and reckon with a nuclear core meltdown.

The nuclear industry touts its historical safety record in the US — with a new generation of reactors which are even safer to operate, the public need not be concerned. But, the seriousness of a nuclear accident, potentially devastating huge sections of our state, which would remain useless for decades, overshadows any consideration of relative safety.

While the probability of an accident may sound vanishingly small, the magnitude of the accident, if and when it should occur, must also be considered. Indeed, to say that an event has a 5% chance of happening in 20 years is another way of saying it has a 95% chance of happening in a longer time frame. Hundred-year floods do happen. To build Grand Gulf II is to ignore the fact that a serious accident — somewhere, eventually — is inevitable.

A National Security Nightmare

Reports indicate terrorist groups have discussed sabotage of nuclear power plants. Most discussions of the chance of a core meltdown assume that the plant operators don't want it to happen. But, we now know there are people who do want a nuclear incident. Human beings have never constructed a completely secure city or building. Nuclear power plants make tempting targets for terrorists.

The Green Party of Mississippi presents these reasons why nuclear power is not an acceptable solution to our energy needs.