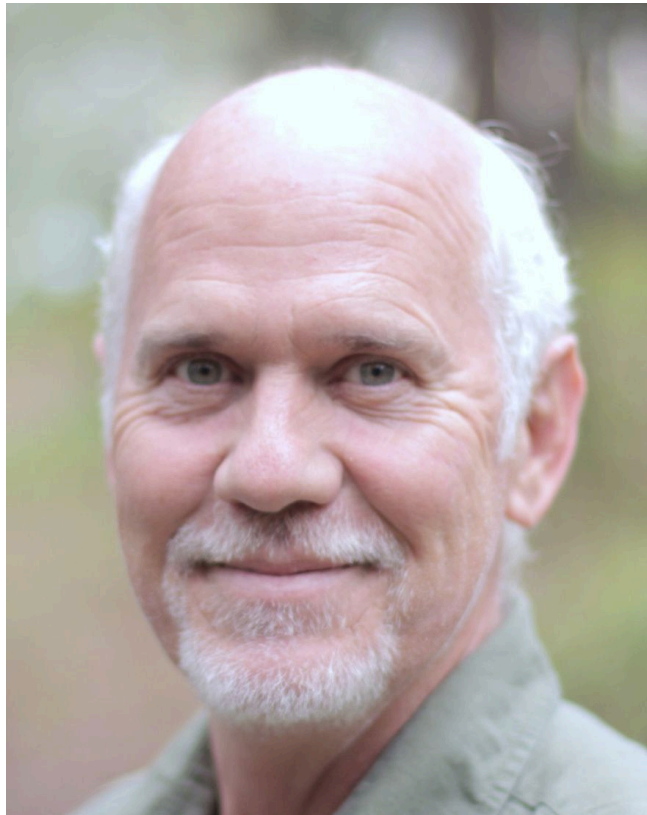


Guest Column: No nukes is good nukes

September 21, 2022



I have a new understanding of those people who complain about the 10% of a plan that they find objectionable rather than focusing on the 90% that is good. For me this has happened with one Senate bill that was approved this year.

Some very good legislation was passed this year setting goals to reduce greenhouse gases and increase development of clean renewable energy. I agree with most of what the legislature and our Governor have accomplished, but I can't help but focus on one bill that I vehemently disagree with. Yes, I do occasionally disagree with the Governor.

I am referring to Senate Bill 846 which would extend the closure date for Diablo Canyon, the last remaining nuclear power plant operating in California. This power plant was scheduled to close in 2025 and now will be allowed to remain operating until 2030. I think this is a mistake.

Fear of blackouts and recent stress on our electrical grid due to the extreme heat that our state has been experiencing were motivating factors in approving this extension. Diablo Canyon provides six to eight

percent of the electricity that California uses. I understand it will be difficult to give this up until clean renewable energy is more fully developed.

Some people suggest that nuclear power is “green” energy, but this is just greenwashing. It is true that nuclear power plants have no visible air emissions, but there are underlying problems with nuclear power and Diablo Canyon that have not been addressed to my satisfaction.

Since it was first proposed, there have been concerns about the location of Diablo Canyon. It sits very close to an active fault, and some have expressed concern that an earthquake could damage the plant resulting in a release of radiation.

These concerns were largely theoretical until March 11, 2011, when a 9.0 earthquake and resulting tsunami damaged the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant in Japan. Six reactors melted down and there was an immediate release of substantial amounts of radioactivity into the air and sea. Not only did the ocean currents carry a little fishing boat to our shores, some of this radiation was also detected on the west coast of the US.

There is still over one million metric tons of highly radioactive water contained on this site and it may take decades to clean it up. They plan to discharge this into the Pacific Ocean a little at a time following the adage that dilution is the solution to pollution.

Why should we care? Radiation is not visible, but exposure to radiation can have a profound effect on the cells in our body. In the aftermath of the Three Mile Island nuclear accident on March 28, 1979, there were no immediate deaths. However, an above average increase in cancer and birth defects in the surrounding area have been documented.

The Chernobyl accident happened on April 26, 1986, when the reactor core melted down and the resulting explosion released radiation across Europe and Russia. The cleanup of this accident is projected to be completed in 2065, nearly 80 years after the accident.

We may have forgotten about these accidents, but the effects will be with us for a long time. Even under the most optimal operating conditions, there is still no permitted facility in the United States to store the radioactive waste from nuclear power plants. Almost all the waste is being stored at current or former nuclear power plants.

Just south of us is the Humboldt Bay nuclear power plant. Decommissioning of this power plant started in 2009 and was not completed until 2021. We no longer get power from this facility, but the radioactive waste is still there.

Possible radiation leaks and the lack of safe long-term storage of radioactive waste should be front of mind when considering continued operation of any nuclear power plant. There are short term benefits but long-term consequences.

After the Fukushima accident there was a decisive global movement to phase out reliance on nuclear power, but our collective memory is short. This does not bode well for trusting that humanity will fund and maintain

storage facilities that must safely contain this radioactive waste for hundreds of years.

If the full cost of nuclear power was charged to customers, it would not compete with truly clean energy sources like solar and wind power. Due to the extreme cost, it is likely that no new nuclear power plants will be built in the United States.

SB846 will provide \$1.4 billion in forgivable loans to Pacific Gas and Electric to “facilitate the extension.”

If nuclear power is a competitive source of energy, they would not need this ongoing subsidy. It would be better to invest in the future energy sources, rather than propping up an industry whose time has come and gone.

Over 40 years ago, after the Three Mile Island accident, I wrote a song with these lyrics, “Never has a poison been so clean. Like a murder in the night, without a fight and without being seen. No Nukes is Good Nukes. I want to see it in the paper today.”

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