

Scranton Times editorial

February 2, 2010

Restart nukes

President Obama's call for new nuclear power development recognizes a perfect storm of problems and opportunities.

America's 104 nuclear plants in 31 states produce 20 percent of the nation's power, but 70 percent of the nation's power that does not produce greenhouse gases. Worldwide, electricity produced by nuclear plants would create 2.5 billion tons of carbon pollution if produced by coal.

Adding nuclear generating capacity quite simply is the only way to meet the nation's increasing energy demands while holding the line on carbon emissions, or reducing them. Wind and solar are important, but nuclear plants are the only nonpolluting source that can produce massive amounts of power 24 hours a day regardless of weather conditions.

New nuke construction also would be a form of long-term job creation, in terms of design, construction and plant operation and support.

Politically, nuclear plant construction is more viable than at any time since the 1979 accident at Three Mile Island. Congress has not embraced the administration's complex cap-and-trade proposal for greenhouse gas reductions. Nukes ensure reduced emissions and reliable power production, and the proposed guarantees offer a basis for a compromise on other aspects of environmental and energy legislation.

Congress has authorized \$18.5 billion in loan guarantees for new plants. The money is not in the form of direct spending; rather it enables nuclear plant developers to obtain financing.

Another advantage of renewed nuclear construction is that it is still an American industry. Companies such as Westinghouse and General Electric have had to rely on foreign markets.

Some older plants will have to come off line at the end of their operating lives, just as power demand justifies new plants. The industry will construct new plants and replace old plants.

The key question is waste. In addition to authorizing new plants, Congress and the administration also should embrace reprocessing techniques that allow most fuel to be reused and rendered incapable of being used for weapons.

Nuclear power is a partial answer to many questions facing the economy and environment. The administration, Congress and the industry quickly should jump-start its renewal.