

December 22, 2013

Gentlemen,

Although we greatly respect your work on climate and lending it a much higher profile in public dialogue than would otherwise be the case, we read your letter of November 3, 2013 urging the environmental community to support nuclear power as a solution to climate change with concern. We respectfully disagree with your analysis that nuclear power can safely and affordably mitigate climate change.

Nuclear power is not a financially viable option. Since its inception it has required taxpayer subsidies and publically financed indemnity against accidents. New construction requires billions in public subsidies to attract private capital and, once under construction, severe cost overruns are all but inevitable. As for operational safety, the history of nuclear power plants in the US is fraught with near misses, as documented by the Union of Concerned Scientists, and creates another financial and safety quagmire – high-level nuclear waste. Internationally, we've experienced two catastrophic accidents for a technology deemed to be virtually 'failsafe'.

As for "advanced" nuclear designs endorsed in your letter, they have been tried and failed or are mere blueprints without realistic hope, in the near term, if ever, to be commercialized. The promise and potential impact you lend breeder reactor technology in your letter is misplaced. Globally, \$100 billion over sixty years have been squandered to bring the technology to commercialization without success. The liquid sodium-based cooling system is highly dangerous as proven in Japan and the US. And the technology has proven to be highly unreliable.

Equally detrimental in cost and environmental impact is reprocessing of nuclear waste. In France, the poster child for nuclear energy, reprocessing only recovers 1% of the waste, annually generates large volumes of radioactive liquid waste that is dumped into the English Channel, and has significantly increased electric costs to consumers. Not to mention the well-recognized proliferation risks of adopting a plutonium-based energy system.

We disagree with your assessment of renewable power and energy efficiency. They can and are being brought to scale globally. Moreover, they can be deployed much more quickly than nuclear power. For instance, in the US from 2002 to 2012 over 50,000 megawatts of wind were deployed. Not one megawatt of power from new nuclear reactors was deployed, despite subsidies estimated to be worth more than the value of the power new reactors would have produced. Similarly, it took 40 years globally to deploy 50,000 megawatts of solar PV and, recently, only 2 ½ years to deploy an equal amount. By some estimates, another 100,000 MW will be built by the end of 2015. Already, renewables and distributed power have overtaken nuclear power in terms of megawatt hour generation worldwide.

The fact of the matter is, many Wall Street analysts predict that solar PV and wind will have reached grid parity by the end of the decade. Wind in certain parts of the Midwest is already cheaper than natural gas on the wholesale level. Energy efficiency continues to outperform all technologies on a cost basis. While the cost of these technologies continues to decline and enjoy further technological advancement, the cost of nuclear power continues to increase and construction timeframes remain excessive. And we emphasize again that no technological breakthrough to reduce its costs or enhance its operation will occur in the foreseeable future.

Moreover, due to the glacial pace of deployment, the absence of any possibility of strategic technological breakthroughs, and the necessity, as you correctly say, of mitigating climate risks in the near term, nuclear technology is ill-suited to provide any real impact on greenhouse gas emissions in that timeframe. On the contrary, the technologies perfectly positioned now, due to their cost and level of commercialization, to attain decisive reductions in greenhouse gas emissions in the near term are renewable, energy efficiency, distributed power, demand response, and storage technologies.

Instead of embracing nuclear power, we request that you join us in supporting an electric grid dominated by energy efficiency, renewable, distributed power and storage technologies. We ask you to join us in supporting the phase-out of nuclear power as Germany and other countries are pursuing.

It is simply not feasible for nuclear power to be a part of a sustainable, safe and affordable future for humankind.

We would be pleased to meet with you directly to further discuss these issues, to bring the relevant research on renewable energy and grid integration to a dialog with you. Again, we thank you for your service and contribution to our country's understanding about climate change.

The energy choices we make going forward must also take into account the financial, air and water impacts and public health and safety. There are alternatives to fossil fuels and nuclear power and we welcome a chance to a dialog and debate with each of you.

Sincerely,

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