



Committee wants year-long study of nuclear power

By Mannix Porterfield, Register-Herald Reporter -- Published: March 4, 2009

CHARLESTON — Nuclear power might be the wave of West Virginia's energy future, but for now, it's back on the Legislature's shelf.

Rather than tackle the divisive and controversial issue, a Senate subcommittee decided Wednesday not to send up a bill aimed at diluting an "effective ban" on nuclear power currently in state code.

That is the thrust of Article 27-A that insists no such plant can be erected without a place to dispose of radioactive waste.

Senate Economic Development Chairman Brooks McCabe, D-Kanawha, wanted that tiny phrase scratched so nuclear investors could start looking at West Virginia, albeit no such installation is likely for at least a decade.

Instead, the subcommittee will ask its parent, the Senate Energy, Industry and Mining Committee, to seek a year-long study by an interim committee.

"I can live with that because it continues the discussion, McCabe said afterward. "Bringing it to a vote and losing, then having people perceive the issue is going to go away is probably not as preferable as actually sitting down and saying this is something we need to look at and consider how our energy policy should address some of these more complicated subjects. So I'm comfortable with that."

McCabe is yielding nothing on his position, despite fears voiced by environmentalists that nuclear power poses safety and health risks, and likely would wind up imposing higher electricity bills on ratepayers.

"We need to understand that nuclear power is an acceptable alternative," he said.

McCabe referred to Dr. Leonard Nelson, former president of WVU Tech, who advised the panel that nuclear power probably will provide most of America's energy needs until clean coal technology surfaces in production.

"For West Virginia to have a ban on consideration of that is inconsistent with our position on coal and natural gas," he said.

"Nuclear is something we're going to have to learn more about and become more comfortable about because I think in the intermediate term, the next 20 years, you're going to see nuclear playing a larger role in providing us power in this country."

One subcommittee panelist, Sen. Dave Sypolt, R-Preston, said the group really hadn't had sufficient time to examine the issue.

"It's a very serious matter," he said. "We wanted to make sure we have all our ducks in a row and our facts straight."

Sypolt said he wasn't bothered by the apparent lack of disposal sites, pointing out some 110 nuclear plants function across the nation.

"Obviously, they're handling the waste," he said. "I think it's (nuclear power) important in light of the

whole energy issue for the United States. We need to make sure that alternative forms of energy are on the table. I'm certainly a supporter of coal. We need to make sure we have our eyes open to all possibilities."

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