



## Ex-WVU Tech president says nuke plant 'absolutely' needed

*By Mannix Porterfield, Register-Herald Reporter -- Published: March 02, 2009*

CHARLESTON — A former WVU-Tech president urged a Senate subcommittee Monday to amend the law so a nuclear power plant could be constructed in West Virginia.

"We absolutely need a nuclear power plant," Dr. Leonard Nelson told a subcommittee, formed after the Senate Energy, Industry and Mining Committee couldn't agree on a bill by Sen. Brooks McCabe.

That bill is aimed at altering a 1996 law that includes the disputed Article 27-a that forbids any such installations without a proper place to dispose of radioactive materials.

McCabe, D-Kanawha, testified earlier the article is tantamount to an "effective ban" on nuclear power, which he sees as the future in West Virginia's energy needs.

In touting his bill earlier, McCabe said a nuclear installation likely wouldn't be in the works for at least a decade.

Nelson suggested that undue fear was generated by problems at Chernobyl and also Three-Mile Island, saying the incident at the latter was "overblown" in the news media.

"Three-Mile wasn't bad at all," he said.

Before he addressed the subcommittee, Don Garvin, legislative director for the West Virginia Environmental Council, said safety is a major concern with nuclear power.

Likewise his group and others in the environmental community see the issue of waste disposal as "huge."

Another matter to consider is the inability to get liability insurance, Garvin said.

But the biggest hindrance appears to be the high cost that would be imposed on ratepayers, Garvin said.

A study in Georgia on a proposed plant there said it would cost ratepayers millions of dollars.

Nuclear power has only been cost effective when massive government subsidies were plowed into such plants, he said.

"I disagree strongly with Sen. McCabe's position for us to be a true energy state we have to have nuclear power," he said.

"We just don't see any future for nuclear power in West Virginia."

With the enormous costs entailed in carbon capturing and sequestration, however, Nelson sharply disputed that.

Nelson told the panel the John Amos power plant burns up 30,000 tons of coal daily, producing some 110,000 tons of carbon dioxide.

Clean coal technology is far into the future, he said.

But for half a century, nuclear power has proven to be both clean and safe, he said.

France gets more than 80 percent of its electrical power from nuclear energy, he said.

“Over the past 50 years, France has had tremendous success with it,” he said.

Spent fuel is recycled, but that technique was banned here by former President Jimmy Carter out of a fear that plutonium produced in the process might fall into the hands of terrorists, he said.

“I’m not saying coal is going out of business,” Nelson said.

On the other hand, without nuclear power, and the prospects of imposing expensive clean technology, coal is going to be “a helluva lot more costly than nuclear.”

Afterward, the subcommittee’s chairman, Sen. Evan Jenkins, D-Cabell, who was named to head the panel after raising safety questions, said he wants to work the bill more before going to the full committee.