

Texas Will Host First New U.S. Nuclear Plants Since 1970s

Two new plants

scheduled to go online in 2014



By James M. Taylor

Not a single nuclear power plant has been commissioned in the United States since 1978, but that is about to change as General Electric and Hitachi have announced a joint venture to build two nuclear power plants in Texas.

The Texas project, announced in June with plants scheduled to begin operations in 2014, is expected to be the first in a new wave of economical and emissions-free nuclear power plants.

NRG Energy, which will operate the plants, has already filed a request with

the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to build the plants in Matagorda County about 70 miles southwest of Houston. Construction of the plants will cost \$2.6 billion each, but they will thereafter produce power for a fraction of the cost of traditional power plants. NRG expects the new plants will create 6,000 new construction jobs and 1,000 permanent operator jobs.

Nuclear Finding Favor

Nuclear power plant construction hit a brick wall in the 1980s because of low

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fossil fuel prices and concerns about the safety of nuclear power. But nuclear is returning to favor with economists, legislators, and the general public.

Fossil fuel prices—and particularly the price of natural gas, which fuels most recently constructed power plants—have soared in recent years. At the same time, new technology has made nuclear power safer than ever. Also important is that nuclear plants produce energy without greenhouse gas emissions.

With each of these factors working in nuclear power's favor, experts predict nuclear power plant construction will take off in the coming decades.

It is "very important for our country to move forward in a very deliberative direction" toward building more nuclear power plants, U.S. Sen. Mary Landrieu (D-LA) told a Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources hearing on June 12. Landrieu's support is noteworthy because Louisiana is a leading

producer of fossil fuels, and because Democrats have typically been more cautious than Republicans regarding nuclear power.

Texans Welcome Plants

Also noteworthy is the relative lack of NIMBY (Not in My Back Yard) sentiment regarding nuclear power. A June 25 *Dallas Morning News* house editorial in response to the announcement of the new nuclear power plants in Texas voiced just the opposite opinion.

"It's time for long-standing opposition to nuclear power to give way to reality," the *Morning News* wrote.

"For environmental and geopolitical reasons, the U.S. must reduce dependence on fossil fuels," the *Morning News* editorial continued. "Coal gasification, a cleaner technology, is relatively untested on a large scale. Wind and solar power are clean but insufficient. Natural gas is becoming more expensive."

"Quite simply, nuclear power offers the only large-scale, feasible alternative to fossil fuels," said Sterling Burnett, senior fellow with the National Center for Policy Analysis. "Wind and solar power are intermittent, and solar power in particular is prohibitively expensive. It is not surprising that to the extent people buy into global warming theory, nuclear power is becoming the power source of choice."

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