

Another Spectacular \$50 Billion No Nukes Victory for the Forces of Solartopia

By Harvey Wasserman
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For the third straight year, against all odds, a national grassroots No Nukes campaign has stripped out of the federal budget a proposed \$50 billion boondoggle for new atomic reactors.

The victory gives a giant boost to solar, wind, efficiency, mass transit and other Solartopian technologies that can solve global warming, sustain real economic growth and bring us a truly green-powered Earth.

This latest victory came Wednesday, February 11, as a top-level Congressional conference committee ironed out the last details of the Obama stimulus package. The loan guarantee scam was slipped into the Senate version by Republican Bob Bennett (R-UT) in cooperation with Democrat Tom Carper (D-DE). The loan guarantees would have backed a Department of Energy program supporting new reactor construction, despite a report from the Government Accountability Office warning that such projects would bankrupt more than half the utilities that might undertake them.

A national grassroots campaign involving virtually all major environmental organizations dealing with energy once again underscored the overwhelming green opposition to atomic power. The Nuclear Information & Resource Service, Beyond Nuclear, Physicians for Social Responsibility, Environment America, NukeFree.org, Greenpeace, the Natural Resources Defense Council, IEER, Center for American Progress, Taxpayers for Common Sense, Friends of the Earth, Sierra Club, Rainforest Action, Rainforest International and more than 200 national and local environmental and taxpayer organizations joined in opposition to the guarantees.

It is not yet clear but seems likely key impetus on the Hill may have come from House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NM) and House committee chairs Henry Waxman (D-CA), David Obey (D-WI) and Ed Markey (D-MA), among others. Gestures of thanks are being widely encouraged.

A similar victory was won in the fall of 2007 when a \$50 billion loan guarantee was slipped into the national energy bill by then-Senator Pete Domenici (R-NM). The campaign prompted a song from Bonnie Raitt, Jackson Browne, Graham Nash, Ben Harper and Keb Mo posted at www.nukefree.org. With the help of Moveon.org, it delivered more than 120,000 signatures to Congress in less than three months.

In 2008 the industry was forced to withdraw a blank check loan guarantee program when the banking system collapsed.

This year's attempt came in the dead of night, with virtually no public knowledge. Only Amy Goodman's DEMOCRACY NOW! Gave it national television coverage, while Richard Greene's CLOUT on Air America and the Peter B. Collins show featured national radio play. No significant story about the plan appeared in the New York Times, USA Today or other major media outside Washington.

The No Nukes victory came within hours of the passing of Guy Chichester, a legendary founder of the Clamshell Alliance and National Green Party. Chichester helped lead the mass demonstrations at the Seabrook (NH) nuclear site that thrust the atomic power issue into the global limelight. In the 1977 LAST RESORT (www.gmpfilms.com) Guy became one of the first to speak on film about a green-powered Earth, arguing that the money being squandered on Seabrook should instead go to renewable energy which would create thousands of jobs and save the planet. As a green pioneer, Chichester's innumerable---often humor-filled---non-violent arrests were matched only by his great heart and loving spirit.

Ironically, this latest push for reactor subsidies coincides with what may be a death blow to the proposed Yucca Mountain radioactive waste dump. Opposed by both Reid and President Obama, the multi-billion-dollar project may be defunded. After a half-century, the US has no high level nuke waste repository, and none planned.

No one expects an end to the industry's relentless assault on the taxpayer trough. New reactor cost estimates have tripled since 2007 and are likely to at least double again. Michael Mariotte of NIRS says pro-nukers now want atomic energy labeled "green" in a national renewable energy standard. As Kevin Kamps of Beyond Nuclear points out, additional attempts to get money are likely to follow in upcoming debate on an Energy Bill and other legislation.

But as renewables and efficiency and the movement supporting them surge ahead, the Solartopian vision of a truly green planet, free of fossil/nuke power, becomes ever more real.

Harvey Wasserman edits www.nukefree.org. His SOLARTOPIA! Our Green-Powered Earth is at www.solartopia.org.