

Editorial: Nuclear power should be an option

Let nuclear power compete -- or be rejected -- on its merits.

Jeremy Herb, Star Tribune

Last update: February 16, 2011 - 8:52 PM
Star Tribune

Minnesota has boxed itself into an **energy policy** corner with statutes that effectively eliminate new coal and nuclear plants -- the two traditional workhorses of baseload power generation -- for meeting the state's future electricity needs.

With coal's critical link to global warming, the state's **17-year-old moratorium** on new nuclear power plants has become a relic.

It's time to lift it so utilities and **policymakers can seriously consider** this clean alternative to coal in years to come.

Minnesota must continue to lead on renewable energy standards, but nuclear power should be a viable option for providing 24-hour-a-day power while cutting carbon emissions and reducing dependence on foreign energy sources.

The industry is effectively regulated, **as shown Wednesday** when a manufacturer of control rods reported possible problems and said it would likely

recommend replacement.

This will not derail a national energy policy debate that has largely embraced nuclear power, bypassing Minnesota's lockout approach to nuclear plants.

Republicans nationally have made reviving the nuclear power industry a priority; most plants were built in the 1960s and 1970s. President Obama is also supportive.

His 2012 budget proposes \$36 billion in loan guarantees for new plants and more than \$800 million for nuclear energy research. Obama and Republicans have also pushed to explore smaller, "modular" nuclear plants. cilities.

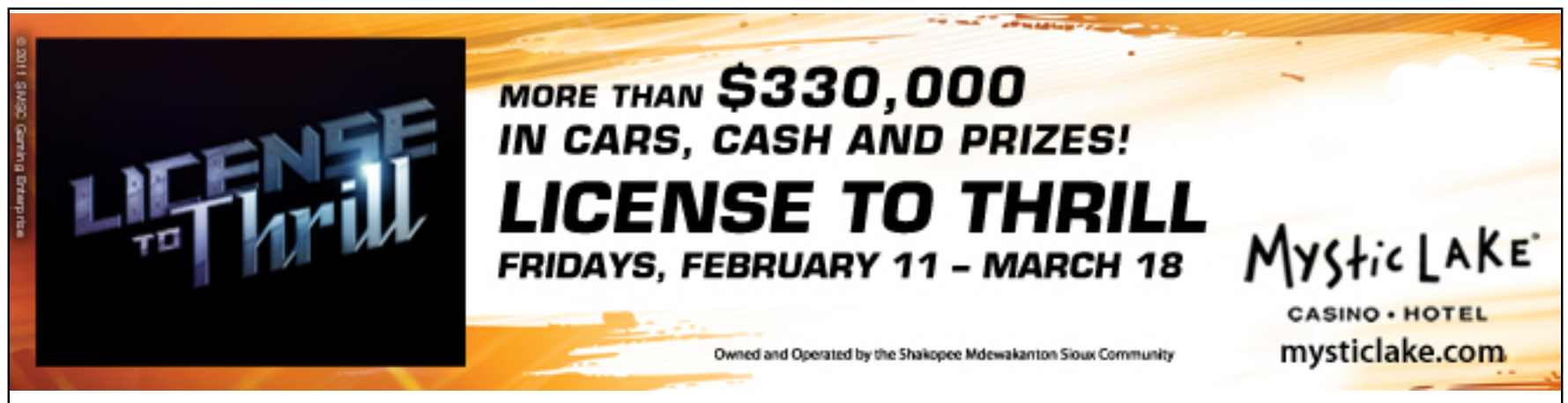
Minnesota's two Democratic U.S. senators also advocate giving nuclear power a fresh look, and **Sen. Amy Klobuchar** supports lifting the state's moratorium.

Minnesota's new Republican legislative majority is also pushing to lift the ban. The House could vote on lifting the moratorium today.

The state Senate has already passed a bill striking the ban's language from 1994 legislation authorizing additional dry-cask storage of nuclear waste at the **Prairie Island nuclear power plant** near Red Wing. The ban on new plants was part of the compromise on the storage.

Lifting the moratorium does not mean that a nuclear power plant will be built any time soon in Minnesota

Advertisement



LICENSE TO THRILL

MORE THAN **\$330,000**
IN CARS, CASH AND PRIZES!

LICENSE TO THRILL
FRIDAYS, FEBRUARY 11 - MARCH 18

Mystic LAKE[®]
CASINO • HOTEL
mysticlake.com

Owned and Operated by the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community

-- or that nuclear energy will be the default solution to future energy needs.

Some of the arguments made by key proponents of lifting the ban -- the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce, Metal Casters of Minnesota and other trade organizations -- downplay those points.

Many business interests focus on rising energy costs. Others believe that lifting the ban would bring jobs to Minnesota.

The reality is that Minnesota's commercial and industrial electricity rates are low compared with other states. There also doesn't appear to be a need for new baseload plants soon.

"Most utilities identify no need for baseload power in their 15-year planning horizons or project a need only at the end of the planning period," according to the state Department of Commerce.

The approval process for a new plant would take several years at best. Lifting the moratorium is not a short-term solution to create construction jobs.

Arguments that nuclear is the only alternative to coal for 24-hour-a-day power (renewables like wind and solar are intermittent) are also outdated. Historically, natural gas has not been used for baseload electricity because of supply and price volatility.

But technological breakthroughs allowing shale gas development in North America and elsewhere have dropped prices dramatically. Many experts expect

that the vast supply -- potentially 100 years of reserves or more -- will keep prices constant.

"A lot of utility execs grew up in the era of volatility and shortage, and I don't think they've changed their mind-sets yet," said **Charles Ebinger**, director of the Brookings Institution's energy security initiative. "The more progressive utilities are looking at this seriously and seeing if gas can't be baseload."

Other crucial questions plague nuclear energy. There is no permanent federal solution for nuclear waste storage.

The cost of a traditional plant's construction also is a huge question mark, since those costs get passed along to ratepayers.

Those advocating for nuclear power should also be pushing for federal climate-change legislation because putting a price on carbon would make nuclear power comparatively more affordable.

Nuclear power may not stack up when policymaking bodies such as Minnesota's Public Utilities Commission weigh it against other power sources in years to come.

But in a rapidly changing energy era, nuclear power should be allowed to compete -- and potentially, be rejected -- on its merits.

Advertisement



Send flowers for any occasion
Bouquets \$19.99
from **19.99**^{+s/h}
ProFlowers

Order ONLY at
proflowers.com/happy
or call 1-877-888-0688