



Nuclear Energy Information Service

“Illinois’ Nuclear Power Watchdog for 23 years”

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Letter to the Editors
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To the Editors:

The 728-word nuclear industry press release masquerading as Nicholas Krystof’s April 9th editorial was – breathtaking! If not for the abundance of factual errors, embarrassing lack of critical thinking, astonishing lapses of logic, and the deadly consequences of his “energy option of choice,” it would have been more appropriate appearing April 1st.

Many safe-energy/anti-nuclear critics would agree that global warming is THE most serious environmental problem facing the world. After that, our views and proposed solutions diverge.

Krystof’s (il)logic in endorsing nuclear power as a “solution” to the global warming problem calls to mind the old joke that “smoking cures cancer.” When you see your problems only in terms of nails, you see only hammers as solutions. Uncritically swallowing the nuclear industry spin version of energy’s role in human-induced global warming, Krystof-logic is doomed to select only nuclear power as the solution. It’s not even discussed whether the problem is one of energy “use,” or “abuse;” or, inappropriate or inefficient use; or manipulated energy markets; or even simply energy “addiction.” Each of these alternate explanations, their permutations and combinations, their relative contributions, suggest vastly different solutions than the knee-jerk, techno-fix solution Krystof arrives at.

Moving beyond the logic, “facts” frame every debate. By accepting uncritically and uncontested only the nuclear industry’s tired, self-serving, and factually disputable assertions, Krystof-logic produces the self-fulfilling prophecy, “nuclear power is green.” For example:

- *“Nuclear power, in contrast with other sources, produces no greenhouse gases.”* Neither do the renewables. Maybe the reactors don’t during operation. But nuclear fuel enrichment depends heavily on CFC use (more potent greenhouse gas molecules than CO₂), and currently, fossil fuel plants to provide the electricity to run enrichment facilities;
- *“Global energy demand will rise 60 percent over the next 25 years, according to the International Energy Agency, and nuclear power is the cleanest and best bet to fill that gap.”* “Cleanest” compared to what? Are the environmental consequences from uranium mining considered? What about proliferation of nuclear expertise, materials, personnel and ultimately weapons in a post-9/11 world? Must “energy demand” (vastly different concept than energy “need”) rise 60%? Even if so, aren’t there other, better ways of meeting these demands/needs? Who is the IEA, and what’s their stake in the debate (16 of 26 member countries use nuclear power, with 6 promoting large worldwide reactor manufacturers)? Krystof obviously avoids serious contemplation of any of these issues.

He disparages the high cost and small percentage-share of electricity production coming from wind and solar power. The problem, however, is currently not one of viable technology; it’s lack of market share: 1.) Renewables are high cost because they lack sufficient market share to create economies of scale that would reduce their costs, and 2.) utility decisions about expanding market shares and obtaining financing for renewables are currently made by CEO’s from nuclear and fossil fuel utilities. The fact that utility foxes have been making decisions about renewable energy chicken coups somehow eludes Krystof.

Applause for his support for aggressive energy conservation. Yet he appears unaware that,

- three separate government and industry studies in the 1990’s concluded that the capacity exists, using “off-the-shelf” (i.e., Home Depot) technology to conserve 22-44% of all electricity currently generated – i.e. more than 1 to 2 times the *entire* output of the U.S. nuclear industry today; and
- the Rocky Mt. Institute testified before Congress in the late 1980’s that a dollar spent on “off-the-shelf” conservation and energy efficiency efforts could displace up to 6.5 times the amount of global warming gases than the same dollar spent on nuclear power.

No new technology required, and we have the capacity to remove nearly 7 times the amount of global warming gas out of the air than by using nuclear power; or the same amount of gas reduction at one-sixth the cost.

His glib dismissal of both the hazards of nuclear plant operation and the nuclear waste issue also is straight from nuclear industry ad sheets, without even a mention of the intensity of the debate and disagreement over both. He speaks unquestioningly of new,

unproven reactor designs (each having unique hazards different from those of today's reactors) in the same glowing terms that nuclear power's government and utility supporters used in the 1950's.

His nod to the "challenge" of nuclear waste disposal asks us to form a false dichotomy: "*But burdening future generations with nuclear wastes in deep shafts is probably more reasonable than burdening them with a warmer world in which Manhattan is submerged under 20 feet of water.*" Choosing a non-nuclear energy future that reduce global warming without increases in nuclear waste and proliferation would seem to be an even more logical choice.

Finally, forgetting that even Einstein had erasers on his pencils, Krystof selects as his "green champion" for nuclear power British scientist and Gaia advocate James Lovelock – without informing readers that Lovelock also advised the British government that using CFC's as refrigerants would have absolutely no harmful effects for the ozone layer. Green, but dim.

The global warming debate is truly one about human survival. Simply regurgitating nuclear industry propaganda without opportunity for rebuttal is not debate, nor responsible. Focussing on merely more "techno-fix" reduces it to an argument over the color of the deck chairs on the *Titanic*. It must be about "changing course," not about "hammer selection." The debate must be broader, grander, and far more inclusive than the "wisdom" of oil politicians, nuclear industry executives, or their media hired guns. This debate over human survival must become ongoing and truly rigorous, warranting more column inches than local department store underwear ads. If it's really about our survival, to reduce its "solution" to the mere selection of one's favorite technology dooms us all.

(950 words)

Gratefully, for a less nuclear world,

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