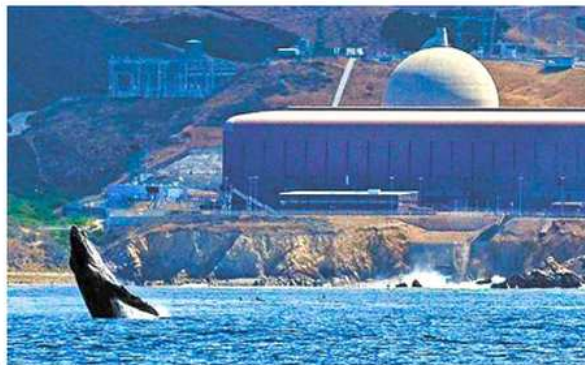


DOCKETED	
Docket Number:	19-SB-100
Project Title:	SB 100 Joint Agency Report: Charting a path to a 100% Clean Energy Future
TN #:	229646
Document Title:	Californians for Green Nuclear Power, Inc. Comment - Why California May Go Nuclear
Description:	<p>Michael Shellenberger, the president of the Berkeley, CA-based nonprofit, Environmental Progress published an article at the Forbes website on Tuesday, September 3, 2019 titled, "Why California May Go Nuclear." His concise article has been viewed almost 25,000 times in one day. He cites relevant political reasons to support maintenance and expansion of California's nuclear power generators, including Diablo Canyon. Please see:</p> <p>https://www.forbes.com/sites/michaelshellenberger/2019/09/03/why-california-may-go-nuclear/</p> <p>This document is being provided by nonprofit CGNP under the "Fair Use" provisions of U.S. copyright law for educational purposes without any expectation of material gain.</p>
Filer:	Gene Nelson, Ph.D.
Organization:	Californians for Green Nuclear Power, Inc.
Submitter Role:	Intervenor
Submission Date:	9/3/2019 10:58:09 PM
Docketed Date:	9/3/2019

Why California May Go Nuclear



[Michael Shellenberger](#) Contributor [Energy](#)



Governor Gavin Newsom has the power to save California's last nuclear plant, Diablo Canyon.

BLOOMBERG (L) JOHN LINDSEY (R)

Last week, a California state legislator [introduced](#) an amendment to the state's constitution that would classify nuclear energy as "renewable."

If the amendment passes, it would likely result in the continued operation of the state's last nuclear plant, Diablo Canyon, well past 2025, its current closure date.

Diablo generates 9% of California's electricity and 20% of its clean, carbon-free electricity.

It is also the most spectacular nuclear plant in the world, made famous by an employee's photo of a humpback whale breaching in front of the plant.

"I'm not going to argue it's not a long shot," [said](#) the legislation's sponsor, Assemblymember Jordan Cunningham.

"But we can't make a serious dent in slowing the warming trend in the world without investment in nuclear power."

If Governor Gavin Newsom decides to support the legislation it would likely become law and Diablo Canyon could continue operating to 2045 or even 2065.

That's because Newsom, who was elected last year with an astonishing 62% of the vote, exercises extraordinary power over the legislature, particularly on energy.

As his first major act as governor, Newsom [worked](#) hard to get the legislature to pass what critics call a "bail-out" of PG&E in July.

The law raises electricity prices to pay for a \$21-billion fund for electric utilities including PG&E to pay for the wildfire lawsuits and fire prevention.

Newsom could reduce by one-third how much California ratepayers must pay of the \$10 billion they owe if nuclear were classified as renewable and Diablo Canyon remained open.

Polling [shows](#) just 28% of voters approve of the "bail-out" while 35% disapprove of it. Seventy-eight percent of Californians (correctly) fear higher electricity prices will result.

Between 2011 and 2018, electricity prices [rose](#) nearly six times more (28%) in California than in the rest of the country (5%).

Some of that increase was due to the [closure of the state's last nuclear plant](#), San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station.

Not only does Newsom's Democratic party have a supermajority, most Republicans are already pro-nuclear.

Newsom could likely save Diablo Canyon without even passing a ballot initiative by simply ordering his Public Utility Commissioners to do so.

Most analysts believe this is unlikely because Newsom himself led the effort to prematurely close Diablo Canyon when he was lieutenant governor.

"I just don't see that this plant is going to survive beyond 2024, 2025," Newsom [said](#) in 2016. "And there is a compelling argument as to why it shouldn't."

But all of that was before wildfires ravaged California in 2017 and 2018, bankrupting PG&E earlier this year.

The utility had to declare bankruptcy after courts awarded billions in awards and damages to victims of wildfires caused by PG&E's electric wires.

And California's anti-nuclear fervor, which dates back to the 1970s, has cooled.

Gavin Newsom was a child when California's Baby Boomers led the world in the fight against nuclear.

Last year lawmakers passed legislation that recognizes nuclear as renewable, but only in 2030, five years after Diablo Canyon is scheduled to close.

Nuclear plants produce just one-quarter the carbon emissions of solar farms, [according](#) to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

And renewables are approaching their [limit](#) in California. The state's electricity grid manager increasingly has to [pay](#) neighboring states to take California's excess solar

California has even cut-off excess power coming from solar farms on sunny, low-demand days, to avoid damaging the grid.

Recognizing nuclear as renewable, and saving Diablo Canyon, would be a bold move for Governor Newsom. It would upset his traditional anti-nuclear environmental allies.

But Newsom has long championed bold moves. In an act of civil disobedience against federal law as San Francisco's major, Newsom in 2004 allowed gay and lesbian couples to marry

During his 2018 gubernatorial election campaign, Newsom branded himself as a different kind of Democrat. His slogan was, "Courage for a Change."

Nuclear is the largest source of clean, carbon-free power in rich nations, and the science shows it is the [safest](#) way to make reliable electricity.

Indeed, four times more people [died](#) on the streets of Los Angeles in 2018 than [have died or will die](#) in all of the world's nuclear accidents, including Fukushima and Chernobyl.

And because nuclear does not produce deadly air pollution, it has actually [saved](#) nearly two million lives to date.

Meanwhile, every time a nuclear plant is closed around the world, emissions rise alongside electricity prices because solar and wind are not reliable substitutes to fossil fuels.

Indeed, there is growing evidence that, because of their intermittent nature, solar and wind actually [lock-in fossil fuels](#), particularly natural gas

The same is true in Europe. Nuclear-heavy France spends nearly half as much for electricity that produces 10 times less carbon emissions than renewables-heavy German electricity.

Newsom has never hidden his interest in being president one day, and has made climate change a signature issue.

Democratic presidential candidates are increasingly speaking out about their support for nuclear to show their seriousness on climate change.

In 2016, Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton [attacked](#) anti-nuclear presidential candidate, Sen. Bernie Sanders, saying he "put ideology ahead of science and would make it harder and more costly to build a clean energy future."

That same year, [Senator Cory Booker](#), now a Democratic presidential candidate, called for keeping existing nuclear plants operating. "I know the challenges global warming [presents]... We've got to support the existing fleet."

And today's Democratic front-runner, former Vice President Joe Biden, is pro-nuclear. "Unlike some of his Democratic rivals," [noted](#) The Washington Post recently, "Biden supports nuclear energy."

Public support for nuclear appears to be growing as voters become aware of its need for mitigating climate change. "The latest results show a modest increase in support for nuclear power," [noted](#) Gallup last April.

Some of that increase, said Gallup "stems from the fact that nuclear energy generates emissions-free electricity -- 60% of Americans favor [dramatically reducing the use of fossil fuels](#) to reduce greenhouse gas emissions."

Conversely, if Newsom does not change course on nuclear, when he runs for the presidency in 2024, as many analysts expect him to do if Trump is re-elected, rivals may challenge his seriousness on climate change, and his commitment to keeping energy prices low.

Since 2016, climate scientists including NASA's James Hansen have repeatedly [urged](#) California leaders to continue operating Diablo Canyon.

And then there are the economic impacts. Beyond raising electricity rates, the closure of Diablo Canyon would result in San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara counties [losing](#) \$27 million per year in local tax revenue, 1,500 well-paying jobs, and a yearly payroll of over \$200 million that supports an additional 2,800 local jobs.

While California is the [fifth-largest economy](#) in the world, it also has the [highest poverty rate](#) in the United States. Half of the entire country's homeless population lives in California.

As for California's climate and environmental record, it is not nearly as strong as it appears. Much of the state's emissions reductions owe to a switch from coal to natural gas in the electricity the state imports, and from keeping population low by blocking new home building, a problem which has [worsened](#) under the governor.

California's power sector emissions, meanwhile, are [over twice as high today](#) as they would have been had the state kept open and built planned nuclear plants. Had California spent an estimated \$100 billion on nuclear instead of on wind and solar, it [would have had enough energy](#) to replace all fossil fuels in its in-state electricity mix.

"No more spreading junk science," Newsom [tweeted](#) yesterday. "There is no planet B -- there's only this one for us."



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