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QuickPoint! – Let Oregon Voters Reconsider Nuclear Power

By Micah DeSilva

Earlier this year, Oregon lawmakers proposed legislation allowing voters to reconsider their 1980 decision to effectively ban construction of new nuclear power plants in the state. The bills never received a hearing.

That was unfortunate, because state law requires electricity generation in Oregon to be 100% emissions-free by 2040. In order to phase out coal and natural gas, utilities will need other fuels that can provide clean, round-the-clock power; and nuclear is the only technology capable of doing that.

California has attempted to replace fossil fuels with wind and solar, but the effort is failing. During a heatwave in 2020, the state was forced to issue rolling blackouts as the sun went down and solar generation fell offline.

Ontario, Canada has been much more successful. The province completely phased out coal in 2014, and it now produces over 93% of its electricity emissions-free—with 63% of that power coming from nuclear.

The Oregon ballot measure approved in 1980 prohibits new nuclear plants from being built until a federally licensed waste depository becomes available; but after more than 40 years of waiting, the federal government still hasn't followed through.

If Oregon legislators are really serious about cutting greenhouse gas emissions, they should place a measure on the ballot in 2024 allowing voters to reconsider the ban enacted 43 years ago.

Micah DeSilva is a Research Associate at Cascade Policy Institute, Oregon's free market public policy research organization.