Moratorium on Nuclear Plants in Hamilton's Air Shed

Dear Councilors of the City of Hamilton:

Hamilton has the opportunity to set a precedent by supporting this moratorium. Instead of standing red-faced, pointing fingers and out-posturing each other regarding the pros and cons of nuclear power, I suggest that both sides of this debate stand silent and read this.

The key issue of our time is sustainability. It has been a background murmur for many years. The time is now to embrace this opportunity. Environmental quality, including climate change, and economic prosperity are key ingredients within a sustainable and healthy environment.

Hamilton is unique since we are transforming from a heavy industrial giant to a more balanced eco-centric economy. The blossoming of the waterfront, escarpment, and ecological focus in all future infrastructure decisions are symptoms of this.

Let’s admit that in the recent past, leadership has been in the dark ages. This echoes the global stage. “The coalition of the willing” is now a tragic comedy. This ‘do-or-die’ message worked when we recently paved the Red Hill Valley, and will be remembered when the financial and environmental detriments of this outdated project concept are passed on to future generations. Now Canada is being bombarded with the nuclear marketing blitzkrieg, using the Bush-like “are you in or out” spin. Something is amiss. The nuclear industry receives tens of billions from taxpayer pockets to stay afloat, yet is certainly not transparent. Definitely these funds eventually pay for the current ad campaigns.

Relating to energy in this era, key issues include basic electricity supply, financials, security, and environmental impacts of electricity generation. Nuclear energy is clearly not the dream solution that the nuclear industry advertisements are portraying. Canada’s nuclear facilities have been shut down countless times to address major issues. The cost of this headache is re-enforced every time I pay my hydro bill which includes a ‘debt-retirement charge’ to cover nuclear cost overruns.

Nuclear is not emissions free either. Emissions of greenhouse gases and other byproducts are released at all stages of the mining, milling, refining, operation and waste storage processes. Accidents such as Chernobyl or Three Mile Island can not be dismissed either. We almost had a similar situation here during the Aug 2004 blackout. The consequences are terrible.

Scientists and engineers still don’t know what to do with nuclear waste. We can leave it for the thousands of generations that follow, but this hardly makes sense. This detail cannot be taken lightly.
Some of these startling uncertainties explain why nuclear facilities are covered only by limited insurance. The country is on the hook for the rest.

Intelligence exists in every community, and in most skulls. We choose to pursue friendly options that reduce our energy dependency. These are known as “nega-watts”. Through conservation, efficiency, changing habits, demand management, and the deployment of new energy efficient technologies, the amount of energy required decreases. These options are discussed at great length, but only implemented with token pilot projects. Regardless, the precautionary principle flags nuclear as the last resort.

To start, here are few steps for Hamilton to consider:
- Encourage clotheslines instead of dryers (remove any impeding bylaws).
- Develop a program to plant trees (fruit, hardwood, etc.) throughout the entire region (cooling impact, wood-working market, beautify, 1-2 per household).
- Develop policies to catch rainwater (paved driveways). Mandate rain barrels.
- Open public pools on Sundays and holidays!
- Other options limited only by the imagination.
- Solar communities, district heating
- Develop a comprehensive conservation and demand management plan.

Let’s pursue the innovative options of efficiency and renewable energy now. We want solar hot water and solar electric power systems to be considered appliances of the future. These other community options can be exciting, empowering, create jobs, and provide energy security.

Otherwise, in a few decades, when nuclear is again rejected with dwindling high-grade uranium supplies, we’ll be shaking our heads with a legacy of waste management for the next 5,000+ generations, and more debt to boot. “What were they thinking” the current stakeholders will be muttering.

Canadians including Hamilton are intelligent enough to pursue options that allow us to steer away from nuclear. It has been judged and deemed too risky in the past. By moving forward with this moratorium, we send a symbolic message to the world, and achieve our Kyoto targets through proaction.

Nuclear is not innovative. Nuclear is dangerous, risky, and a proven flop. Nuclear is our last preferred option.

Hence, Hamilton should endorse this moratorium against this construction of any new nuclear facilities within our boundaries. We choose to start a new direction, and take steps to actually move and implement these fresh ideas.

Regards. Peter

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