

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 5991

As Reported by House Committee On: Technology & Economic Development

Title: An act relating to studying nuclear power as a replacement for electricity generated from the combustion of fossil fuels.

Brief Description: Studying nuclear power as a replacement for electricity generated from the combustion of fossil fuels.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Energy, Environment & Telecommunications (originally sponsored by Senators Ericksen, Sheldon, Hewitt, Brown, Mullet, Honeyford and Benton).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Technology & Economic Development: 2/20/14, 2/21/14, 2/26/14 [DPA].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill (As Amended by Committee)

- Creates a Joint Select Committee on Nuclear Energy to study how the state can advance and support the generation of clean energy in the region through the use of nuclear power.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TECHNOLOGY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 16 members: Representatives Morris, Chair; Habib, Vice Chair; Smith, Ranking Minority Member; Short, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Dahlquist, DeBolt, Fey, Freeman, Kochmar, Magendanz, Stonier, Tarleton, Vick, Walsh, Wylie and Zeiger.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 2 members: Representatives Hudgins and Ryu.

Staff: Scott Richards (786-7156).

Background:

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

According to the federal Energy Information Agency, there are currently 65 commercially operating nuclear power plants with 104 nuclear reactors in 31 states around the country. These plants generate about 20 percent of United States electricity each year.

The Columbia Generating Station (CGS) near Richland, Washington, is the Pacific Northwest's only commercially operating nuclear power plant. The CGS is operated by Energy Northwest, a not-for-profit joint operating agency. The entire output of the CGS is marketed by the Bonneville Power Administration. According to the most recent state fuel mix report, the CGS supplied about 4.7 percent of the electricity used by retail customers in the state in 2012.

Summary of Amended Bill:

Joint Select Taskforce on Nuclear Energy. The Joint Select Taskforce on Nuclear Energy (Taskforce) is created to study how the state can advance and support the generation of clean energy in the region through the use of nuclear power. In its deliberations, the Taskforce must consider the greatest amount of environmental benefit for each dollar spent based on the life-cycle cost of any nuclear power technology. Life-cycle costs must include the storage and disposal of any nuclear wastes. The Taskforce must report any findings and recommendations to the Legislature by December 1, 2014, and terminates on December 15, 2014.

Taskforce Membership. The Taskforce must consist of eight members that serve on the legislative standing committees with primary jurisdiction over energy issues. The President of the Senate must appoint two members from the majority caucus and two members from the minority caucus. The Speaker of the House of Representatives must appoint two members from each caucus. The Taskforce members must choose their own chair and officers from their own membership.

Meetings. The Taskforce must hold no more than four meetings, with two of those meetings in Richland, Washington.

Staff. The Taskforce must be staffed by nonpartisan staff of the Senate and the House of Representatives. All expenses and hiring of additional staff must be approved by the Senate and the House of Representatives.

Findings. The Legislature intends that nuclear power should be studied as a possible replacement for electricity consumed in the region that is generated from the combustion of fossil fuels.

Amended Bill Compared to Substitute Bill:

The amended bill removes finding stating that the Legislature finds that nuclear power is a safe, reliable, cost-effective, and carbon-free source of electricity.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Amended Bill: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Energy Northwest started an effort in 2009 to investigate the development of new nuclear power and decided it was time to consider new nuclear power facilities in the long range plans of the organization. Energy Northwest concluded that the challenges of large scale nuclear power were not in its best interest, so we choose small modular nuclear power. Small modular nuclear power technologies produce less than 300 megawatts, take less time to construct, and match supply to demand better than large scale nuclear power. Energy Northwest is encouraged about the work of the future Taskforce. It will allow for an open discussion on these emerging technologies.

(In support with amendments) The bill should also consider nuclear fusion technologies into the work of the Taskforce.

(Opposed) The intent statement is problematic. It says that the Legislature finds nuclear power is a safe, reliable, cost-effective, and carbon-free source of electricity. The bill is about a study and a statement such as this is premature and puts this statement into law. There are not enough public meetings to allow for sufficient public input. Additional public meetings should be in held in Spokane, Vancouver, and Seattle. There are questions about the need for the bill given that technologies used in small modular nuclear reactors are not yet proven. The committee should consider an amendment that would add a worst case scenario nuclear accident to the life-cycle costs of nuclear power.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Dale Atkinson, Energy Northwest.

(In support with amendments) Lon Freeman.

(Opposed) Frances Hall; and Tom Buchanan, Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.