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All Things Nuclear

# An Open Letter on Nuclear Energy to President-Elect Donald Trump and Governor Rick Perry

Posted on [December 20, 2016](#) by [ansnuclearcafe](#) — [Leave a reply](#)

*Editor's note: In an open letter written by [Environmental Progress](#) to President-Elect Donald Trump and Governor Rick Perry, ANS and 38 other nuclear professionals and organizations urged both leaders to take strong action to save and grow America's nuclear energy sector.*

Dear President-Elect Donald Trump and Governor Perry,

We are writing as scientists, economists, conservationists and citizens to urge you to take strong action to save and grow America's nuclear energy sector.

Nuclear power plants in the U.S. are struggling against cheap natural gas, heavily-subsidized renewables and low electricity demand. At the same time, global demand for electricity is set to rise 70 percent in 25 years thanks to the rise of energy-hungry developing nations around the world.

And technological advances mean that new nuclear reactor components can increasingly be mass-manufactured in factories and shipped around the world for assembly on-site.

Meeting rising global demand for electricity with advanced nuclear reactors instead of coal will do more to reduce air pollution and mitigate climate change than any number of United Nations treaties.

In the 1960s and 70s, the US was the world leader in nuclear technologies. Today, unfortunately, we are forcing innovative and well-capitalized entrepreneurs like Bill Gates to go abroad to build new projects.

China is making a big investment in at least five different advanced nuclear designs, and last September signed a deal to develop and manufacture a new nuclear reactor designed by Gates' company, Terrapower. Company officials say they wanted to develop the reactor in the U.S., but outmoded federal licensing regulations made doing so impossible.

Those regulations create unnecessary delays. After 16 years and \$500 million in Department of Energy and private sector investment, the U.S. firm NuScale — whose smaller plant design includes novel safety features — must wait another three and half years for approval from the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to build its first commercial plant.

Meanwhile, Canada is supporting the development of a first-of-kind reactor that uses chemical salts rather than water as a coolant. The design precludes meltdowns and could be cheaper than current models.

We can't afford to leave global competition to chance. A better approach would be modeled on President Dwight Eisenhower's 1953 "Atoms for Peace" initiative. Recognizing that cheap electricity is a key driver of economic growth and job creation, Eisenhower's program financed the peaceful use of nuclear power around the world "to provide abundant electrical energy in the power-starved areas of the world."

This starts with the U.S. significantly expanding the financing of US-made nuclear reactors through the Export-Import Bank, World Bank and other development agencies.

Because the U.S. government does not offer financing, "U.S. companies continue to lose significant market share to an ever-increasing number of foreign government-owned or led competitors, including Russia, Japan, France, China and the Republic of Korea," warned the Department of Commerce recently.

What's needed are not subsidies but rather long-term loans and loan guarantees to foreign customers seeking to buy American technologies.

Ensuring that US firms have a competitive edge in global nuclear energy markets would do more to protect the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty than any amount of diplomatic maneuverings at the United Nations.

Back home, we must level the playing field for nuclear. Solar and wind receive large federal and state subsidies that nuclear plants don't get. Until there is a single, technology-neutral incentive for clean energy, subsidies to every form of clean energy should be made equal.

We encourage you to authorize the Departments of Defense and Energy to buy and use advanced nuclear reactors for use at military bases and laboratories to demonstrate their safety, and bring down their price.

DOE should create a “test bed,” perhaps with ocean access for easier export, where private sector entrepreneurs can quickly demonstrate their new designs, and rapidly bring them to global markets at low cost.

The DoD already does this with the nuclear reactors it uses in submarines and aircraft carriers. Indeed, the Navy originally developed the pressurized light-water reactor technology now used in most nuclear plants.

All of this will require new regulations to take account of the inherent safety features of new designs. It makes no sense to regulate jet planes the same way we do propeller planes and yet that is precisely how the federal government treats new nuclear reactor types—an approach that needlessly slows their development.

We know you and the new Congress will seek to deliver on industrial jobs for working class voters, and work together on a new infrastructure program. Making nuclear great again should be a key part of those efforts.

Signed\*,

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*\* Organizations listed for identification purposes only*