

Dear Chair Lively, Vice Chairs Gamba and Levy, and members of the committee:

My name is Maya Rommwatt, and I live in Roseburg. I'm testifying today in opposition to HB 4046, which seeks to advance nuclear energy development in Oregon by funding a biased study that focuses on its advantages without including a well-rounded look at its disadvantages.

Oregon voters were clear when we passed the moratorium on nuclear reactors, that new nuclear power should not be built in our state until there is a place to put all of the dangerous waste that the industry generates, in a repository that will not harm communities. That waste repository still has not been built, forty-five years later. Clearly, finding a safe system for disposing of nuclear waste has been a challenge for the industry, but it is a challenge that we should not gloss over. Nuclear reactors of any size produce highly radioactive waste and that waste can remain hazardous for hundreds of thousands of years. It would undermine both our democracy and our health and safety if Oregon were to consider expanding nuclear energy in our state without first having a permanent solution to nuclear waste.

The lack of a safe repository for nuclear waste is one of two major safety concerns that should be considered when examining nuclear energy. The other is the security of communities where nuclear power is sited. No one should have to fear for their life and health because the energy produced in their community is a major risk. But this is exactly the threat nuclear energy generation poses to communities, and it is likely being made even less safe under the current administration. This administration has made clear that health and safety is not a concern and that rules intended to protect public health are to be dispensed with. For example, the current administration has pushed the Reactor Pilot Program—which aims to roll out a handful of test nuclear reactors to the operating stage in little more than six months from now—without relying on the Nuclear Regulatory Commission that normally oversees safety in the construction of reactors. In this project the Nuclear Regulatory Commission is only serving in an advisory role because the nuclear industry has complained that the Commission has been too strident in its concern for safety precautions. Perhaps because the pilot program timeline is so tight, the administration has essentially sought to crowdsource safety reviews of reactors in the program, asking academics to review the plan details in a volunteer capacity. This makes it very clear to me that safety is not their top concern. This is not a safe climate within which to consider building new nuclear power.

Another consideration is both the economics of nuclear energy and its relationship to renewable energy. Oregon is a leader in climate legislation, but if we allow the nuclear industry to gain a foothold here, critical resources and momentum that we have been building for renewable energy will likely be diverted to the nuclear industry. This is a crucial moment for renewable energy and we cannot afford to lose our momentum to secure a safer, more equitable future. Nuclear energy runs at least five times more expensive than renewable energy. We are in a moment of rapidly increasing energy prices, so rapid in fact that energy affordability is driving election results across the country. My community and others in Oregon cannot afford energy from a source at five times the rate of renewables and as unsafe as nuclear.

Sincerely,
Maya Rommwatt
Roseburg, Oregon