Speaker Madigan, Exelon Declare “Nuclear War” on Renewables, Pass HR1146

Resolution prelude to “bailout” for unprofitable nukes, national anti-renewables campaign

CHICAGO— By voice vote the Illinois House approved a resolution introduced by House Speaker Michael Madigan with extensive cooperation from Exelon Corporation that would create massive subsidization of unprofitable Exelon nuclear plants in Illinois, and do serious damage to the growth of the renewable energy sector.

HR1146, the Nuclear Power Plant Closure resolution was introduced by Speaker Madigan only last Friday, May 23rd, largely at the behest of Exelon Corporation. It sets in motion policy and governmental mechanisms that would essentially “nuke” renewable energy in Illinois, and guarantee that nuclear and coal would be the mainstay of Illinois electricity production for the foreseeable future.

“This Resolution takes energy in Illinois backwards at least 15 years,” says David Kraft, Director of the Chicago-based Nuclear Energy Information Service, a nuclear watchdog and renewable energy advocacy organization.

“If its clauses ever become legislated, they would literally mandate the use of nuclear energy in Illinois, and guarantee that nuclear and coal would be the mainstay of Illinois electricity production for the foreseeable future,” Kraft points out.

Last week in the Legislature, Madigan and Exelon conspired on an agreement to kill the Renewable Energy Portfolio Standard (RPS) fix, in exchange for Exelon keeping running for the next year five nuclear reactors it said were unprofitable, and was threatening to close. This week Exelon and Madigan are attempting to unleash every aspect of State government to support the continuation of running nuclear reactors, potentially awarding them “clean energy credits” like solar and wind would get, and use the upcoming EPA air standard requirements as a way to use nukes to offset the pollution from coal plants, many of which otherwise face shutdown, allowing them to continue operating.

“This Resolution is not just a pro-nuclear resolution. It is an overt effort to destroy renewable energy statewide, a way to keep dirty coal plants running, and a way to continue and make permanent the outdated system of ‘centralized baseload power,' in spite of the fact that the Legislature already granted ComEd 10 years of rate increases to finish a “smart grid” which was supposed to begin to replace the outdated baseload utility model, and be more renewables friendly,” Kraft maintains.

The Resolution:

• amounts to massive subsidization of aging, uneconomic nuclear reactors in Illinois, while trying to argue for “free market solutions” simultaneously. HR 1146 grossly slants the table in favor of these unprofitable reactors.
• tries to get the State to officially declare nuclear power “clean” and “emissions free,” neither of which is true. “An energy source that produces wastes that society has to keep out the environment for 6,000+ generations can hardly claim to be ‘clean,'” Kraft points out.
• attempts to use unsubstantiated scare tactics – job loss, grid instability, not meeting upcoming federal greenhouse gas emission standards – as ways of panic-peddling adoption of its inaccurate and in many cases false claims in the Preamble. Many of the problems identified as needing to be solved by keeping the old, non-profitable nuclear reactors operating could be solved by simply fixing the RPS, and implementing more renewable energy, as the current RPS law requires.
• calls for extensive reports from four state agencies to be delivered to the Legislature by November, all ordered to reach a pre-determined conclusion (“we need to keep nuclear plants open for XYZ reasons…”), BEFORE the subject matter is even investigated – a serious design flaw to any study known as “pre-judging the outcome,” resulting in the results and conclusions being invalid and unacceptable.
• provides for no public participation process to challenge the assumptions and conclusions of such reports/studies.
• does not indicate who will pay for all of the staff time and research done by four State agencies, who will essentially be working for free as Exelon Corporation employees. Why should a private entity have the ability to “bill” taxpayers for “reports” that, by definition are not going to be valid anyway? (see point above).
• literally calls on the State to petition the U.S. EPA to order the State to keep nuclear reactors operating to stay in compliance with upcoming federal greenhouse gas standards. “Building more renewable energy through
the RPS would achieve the same result, without the radioactive wastes and threat of a nuclear disaster,” Kraft maintains. “Why not have the EPA use this same power to order Illinois to build more renewables?”

Wanting to insure that his Resolution appeared to have no opposition, Speaker Madigan took a particularly paranoid approach to getting it out of the House Environment Committee unanimously. He used an arcane Speaker privilege to temporarily dismiss six Committee members likely to vote against the Resolution – Reps. Sente, Gabel, Harris, Jakobsson, Nekritz, and Halbrook – and replaced them with six Reps who voted in favor of HR1146.

“Another fine instance of exemplary Illinois governance,” notes NEIS’ Kraft.

Beyond the local significance to Illinois, the Resolution is actually a piece of a national program Exelon is orchestrating (with the help of ALEC and others) to keep in operation old nuclear plants which have been losing money for years.

Exelon is the primary funding source for “Nuclear Matters,” a pro-nuclear advocacy organization formed in March with a 2-week flurry of full-page ads in the New York Times. It is also a partner with Entergy, another nuclear utility, in the formation and funding of the “Center for Climate and Energy Solutions.” Exelon’s CEO Christopher Crane has just recently been named head of the Nuclear Energy Institute, the trade and lobbying arm of the nuclear industry.

Together, along with groups like ALEC, these entities are putting together a concerned national program to not only promote the failed nuclear industry, but front for the coal industry under the smokescreen of complying with upcoming federal greenhouse gas standards, to ensure that the centralized, baseload concept of electricity service prevails, and efficiency and renewable energy is marginalized.

One of the facets of this effort is halting and reversing state RPS and efficiency standard laws, as ALEC has been attempting, and as Speaker Madigan and Exelon have now done in Illinois with the passage of HR1146 and the failure to fix the Illinois RPS law.

“These pro-nuclear entities are declaring outright ‘nuclear war’ on renewables,” warns Kraft. “HR1146 was the first volley of this war in Illinois. And while HR1146 was a kind of Pearl Harbor victory for them against renewable energy, Speaker Madigan had better read up on his U.S. history, and recall who ultimately won WWII,” Kraft says.