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Chattanooga: Ex-TVA head blasts plans for nuke plants



By: Dave Flessner (Contact)

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Former TVA Chairman S. David Freeman returned to his native Chattanooga Thursday to denounce proposals by the Tennessee Valley Authority to build more nuclear reactors.

timesfreepress.com Chattanooga Times Free Press audio S. David Freeman - Download MP3-

"Unfortunately, the concern over global warming has provided an opening where the nuclear industry has risen up from the dead." Mr. Freeman told reporters during a news conference organized by citizen groups opposed to building more nuclear reactors.

As a TVA director from 1977 to 1984, Mr. Freeman voted to scrap many of the 17 reactors the federal utility planned to build as part of the nation's most ambitious nuclear power program.

Video: Nuclear debate PDF: Bellefonte petition

Despite construction delays and cost overruns a generation ago in TVA's nuclear program, the utility has boosted the efficiency and safety performance of its reactors, according to data from the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

"The TVA board has made no decision yet about building new reactors beyond Watts Bar, but we have applied for a combined operating license at Bellefonte because we project we will need more generation to meet the growth in the population and energy use in the Valley," TVA spokesman Gil Francis said.

Last week, three environmental groups — the Southern Alliance for Clean Energy, the Bellefonte Efficiency and Sustainability Team and the Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League — filed a legal challenge to block licensing of the proposed new reactors at the Bellefonte site in Hollywood, Ala.

TVA officials contend the new reactors may be needed to meet the nearly 2 percent annual growth in power demand in the region without generating the carbon dioxide from fossil fuel plants that is blamed by many for global warming.

Mr. Freeman, an 82-year-old lawyer and engineer who has headed four U.S. utilities, accused TVA officials of being "nucleoholics" addicted to atomic power despite the agency's costly mistakes from overbuilding nuclear plants a generation ago.

"The idea that we should build a whole lot more radioactive factories in this age of terrorists doesn't make any sense to me when we have renewable alternatives that the rest of the world is embracing," he said.

Mr. Freeman said projections by other utilities from costlier new nuclear plants suggest the average cost of power generation will rise from new nuclear plants to around 12 cents per kilowatt-hour, or 60 percent more than TVA's average cost of electricity today.

Mr. Freeman said a more cost effective approach for the Tennessee Valley would be for TVA to resume the power conservation and renewable source push pioneered three decades ago when he was the utility's chairman.

Mr. Freeman said TVA has lost its pioneering mission as a living laboratory in the utility industry.

But Mr. Francis said TVA is investing \$22 million this year to promote energy conservation and continues to explore renewable power sources such as wind, solar and biomass.

"Renewables are important, but you still need baseload power supply to generate electricity when the wind doesn't blow and the sun doesn't shine," he said.

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S. David Freeman, former chairman of the Tennessee Valley Authority and onetime Chattanooga resident, met with representatives of news outlets to discuss his opposition to nuclear energy. TVA spokesperson Gil Francis explains his organization's position on the issue.

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