



## 2. QUAKE AFTERMATH -- ENERGY POLICY: Will Japanese crisis affect nuclear, CES discussions? *(E&E Daily, 03/15/2011)*

**Katie Howell, E&E reporter**

Nuclear energy advocates are optimistic the ongoing Japanese nuclear crisis will not affect energy policy discussions on Capitol Hill, including talks of a possible "clean energy" standard, but they concede nuclear energy will receive more careful scrutiny moving forward.

"I think any incident like this, we ought to take the opportunity to learn from. If we find there are any changes we can make in any nuclear facilities, we have to make them safer," Sen. Richard Burr (R-N.C.) said last night in the Capitol. "We should incorporate that, but I don't think this is a death knell to nuclear generation in the future."

The United States has not built a new nuclear plant in decades, but talks have been resurrected in recent years about ramping up nuclear's share of domestic energy generation. And the energy source is considered a mainstay of the proposed clean energy standard that President Obama and lawmakers in Congress have touted as the best path forward on energy policy this year.

Concerns are mounting about a possible nuclear reactor meltdown in Japan after an earthquake and tsunami devastated the nation last week. And in Washington, left-leaning interest groups and lawmakers have used the disaster to call for a re-examination of nuclear energy development and regulation in the United States.

But nuclear advocates are not overly concerned.

"There's problems with every technology, but the world is not going to stop generating nuclear power," Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) told reporters last night.

Last Congress, Graham led efforts to craft a bipartisan clean energy standard (CES) that would require utilities to generate a certain percentage of their electricity from low-carbon sources, like renewable or nuclear energy. And he is once again in talks to draft a new version of that legislation, which is seen by many as the most promising path forward on bipartisan energy legislation this year.

The idea gained momentum in January when President Obama touted it -- and mentioned nuclear energy, specifically -- during his State of the Union address. Sen. Jeff Bingaman (D-N.M.), chairman of the Senate Energy and Commerce Committee, has been in talks with the White House about such a standard. Graham and Sen. Mark Begich (D-Alaska) have also been in talks about drafting language. Sen. Richard Lugar (R-Ind.) has proposed a similar energy standard that would also include nuclear energy.

Lugar said the ongoing Japanese crisis won't affect how he moves forward with his legislation, which he has not yet introduced. "There will be anxiety as people try to ascertain how the Japanese are able to cope with it, but we'll all be observing that and it will be in the background certainly of nuclear discussions," he added.

Other lawmakers also are optimistic that energy policy talks, including nuclear energy, will continue.

"We shouldn't start with that assumption," Sen. Mark Udall (D-Colo.) said of the crisis' effect on CES discussions. "Regardless of what's happening in Japan -- as tragic and as important as it is -- this still looms as a significant challenge for the country. We need a comprehensive energy policy -- that reality hasn't disappeared because of the terrible events in Japan."

And the White House yesterday refused to turn its back on nuclear energy.

Nuclear power "remains a part of the president's overall energy plan. ... We remain committed to the clean energy standard and the other aspects of the president's energy plan," White House spokesman Jay Carney said.

## More scrutiny

Nuclear energy supporters in Congress concede that the power source should receive closer oversight on Capitol Hill as energy policy discussions move forward.

"I think there's going to be a lot more discussion than there probably was in the past," Begich said. "I don't know what it will do to the CES in total, but in nuclear, you're clearly going to have more scrutiny."

Political observers also say nuclear energy generation will face more scrutiny moving forward, but they say it is too early to conjecture about the policy implications.

"It's premature to speculate on how a crisis that's unfolding thousands of miles away may or may not impact U.S. policy from a political perspective," said Joshua Freed, director of the clean energy initiative at Third Way, a centrist Democratic think tank.

And Bingaman, too, said it was too early to presume the policy implications.

"Oh I'm sure that there'll be a lot of questions asked, but I don't know how it will shake out," Bingaman said. "I think we're still trying to determine what lessons the Japanese are going to learn from the problems they've encountered and then which of those lessons are applicable to us."

Bingaman said he had not decided whether he will hold a hearing in the Senate energy committee on the situation.

*Reporter Elana Schor contributed.*

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