



Energy under the Trump Administration

The Blatant Bipartisanship of Nuclear

April 27, 2017

By Samuel Brinton

"...It is a lot fun when we can work on issues that we agree on, so let's get it done." - Sen. Jim Inhofe[i]

In the most partisan Congress in history, nuclear innovation seems to be an area of rare and beautiful agreement. In fact, it seems to be a good place to start conversations as is evident by the early movement of nuclear-related pieces of legislation in the 115th Congress.

One of the first pieces of legislation to be passed by the House Committee on Space, Science, and Technology: the **Nuclear Energy Innovation Capabilities Act (NEICA)**. This legislation passed the House unanimously last year and again passed the House by voice vote within the first week of the latest congressional session. A bipartisan collaboration in the Senate led to this language being approved as an amendment to federal energy legislation with a vote of 87 to 4. As NEICA was introduced in 2017, Senator Mike Crapo commented that "there is bipartisan agreement in Congress that nuclear energy and nuclear research have been underutilized as a reliable, safe, clean and efficient part of our national energy portfolio."^[ii]

One of the first legislative hearings of the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works: the **Nuclear Energy Innovation and Modernization Act (NEIMA)**. It had passed out of the same committee last year and then again this year in late March. Senator Deb Fischer recognized the rare success of the legislation with a statement that "At a time when we see it is hard for us to agree on things, it is nice to be part of a bipartisan effort."^[iii]

What do the Senator who famously threw a snowball on the Senate floor to disprove climate change and the Senator who famously has spoken on the Senate floor every week since April 2012 on the dangers of climate change have in common? They are adamant supporters of

nuclear innovation. Senator Jim Inhofe and Senator Sheldon Whitehouse could not be further apart on a variety of issues, yet they continually cosponsor efforts to jumpstart the nuclear innovation ecosystem.

Will this bipartisanship continue as the partisanship of Congress exacerbates? That is yet to be seen. What is clear is that regardless of whether Republican or Democrat, Congress agrees that nuclear innovation will be a critical component to the environmental, economic, and security successes of the nation.

In 2011, the Pew Research Center noted that only 30 percent of Democrats supported increased use of nuclear power, compared to 54 percent of Republicans. Although it is likely that this divide has decreased in the six years since the research, the historical image of the environmentalist (and historically anti-nuclear) Democrat has only recently begun to dissipate. Although ecomodernists like the Breakthrough Institute and pragmatic centrists like Third Way continue efforts to bring liberal-minded constituents into the pro-nuclear dialogue, this history brings its own set of challenges.

The other side of the aisle seems to be a little simpler. Recently, Republican U.S. officials meeting with allies sought to add text to an international statement on energy which included "the importance of civil nuclear energy for providing reliable and clean baseload energy." With \$120 million for Yucca Mountain funding in his budget, President Trump has signaled his definitive support for solutions to nuclear power challenges which will likely get further support on the Hill. This makes sense seeing as how counties with nuclear power plants were three times more likely to vote for President Donald Trump, according to the Nuclear Energy Institute. Republicans have traditionally supported the nuclear industry and there doesn't seem to be any change in that trend.

So what should the next key elements be for a blatantly bipartisan nuclear bill?

Economics: Addressing the common economic needs of the country will be the most likely starting point. Nuclear energy provides \$60 billion to the national GDP each year with 475,000 jobs. Preserving these and future nuclear jobs should be a priority.

- What to Watch: New York and Illinois have passed state legislation supporting the economic needs of nuclear power plant operation, but be on the lookout for efforts in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and others.

Innovation: As mentioned before, the widely successful and bipartisan Nuclear Energy Innovation Capabilities Act and the Nuclear Energy Innovation and Modernization Act share an important word: innovation. Regardless of views on the current fleet of nuclear reactors, policy makers want options for energy in the future and advanced nuclear innovation could be one of those options.

- What to Watch: Passage of NEICA and NEIMA could potentially occur in 2017 with the FY 2018 appropriations as another opportunity for advanced nuclear innovation support.

Waste Management: While the history of nuclear waste management may be excessively contentious, the strong bipartisan efforts of the past few years, including the Nuclear Waste Administration Act (NWAA), have proven that solutions to this problem don't need to be partisan nor political. Bipartisan efforts on Yucca Mountain, interim storage, and even deep borehole research will be needed for progress to be made.

- What to Watch: NWAA will likely be submitted shortly in conjunction with policy decisions made in the FY 2017 Appropriations. The Nuclear Waste Policy Act Amendments Act of 2017 has also recently been submitted and is likely to see successful passage in the House.

Infrastructure: As the President continues to mention the need for a national infrastructure legislation package, Congress is united in agreement that the nation's infrastructure is in disrepair. Energy infrastructure development and security will be a hot topic for nuclear support.

- What to Watch: With the consideration of \$1 trillion in public and private investment in infrastructure, watch for nuclear existing and future fleet support in the package.

As Republicans maintain their support and Democrats begin to strongly champion nuclear as a solution to the challenge of climate change, we may be seeing the perfect storm for action on nuclear issues. As John F. Kennedy once said, "Neither the fanatics nor the faint-hearted are needed. And our duty as a Party is not to our Party alone, but to the nation, and, indeed, to all mankind." Solving the challenges in the nuclear policy world just might be something each party can agree on.

[i] Legislative Hearing on S. 512, the Nuclear Energy Innovation and Modernization Act: Wednesday, March 8, 2017, 10:00AM, Room 406 of the Dirksen Senate Office Building, Webcast here: <https://www.epw.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/hearings?ID=004FC325-6ED4-433F-8E39-D5735FD2E7AA>

[ii] "Bipartisan Group of Senators Introduce Nuclear Energy Innovation and Modernization Act", Available at: <https://www.epw.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/2017/3/bipartisan-group-of-senators-introduce-nuclear-energy-innovation-and-modernization-act>

[iii] Legislative Hearing on S. 512, the Nuclear Energy Innovation and Modernization Act: Wednesday, March 8, 2017, 10:00AM, Room 406 of the Dirksen Senate Office Building, Webcast here: <https://www.epw.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/hearings?ID=004FC325-6ED4-433F-8E39-D5735FD2E7AA>

Samuel Brinton is the founder of Core Solutions Consulting. Previously, he was a senior policy analyst with the Bipartisan Policy Center's Energy Project, where he helped to lead the efforts of the Nuclear Waste Initiative. Before joining Bipartisan Policy Center, he worked as a fellow for the Clean Energy Program at Third Way, where he helped develop a campaign to promote policies that spur innovation in advanced nuclear energy. He also served as a fellow with the Clean Air Task Force and Breakthrough Institute, preparing a report on the variety of methods for managing nuclear waste.

Global America Business Institute | 1001 Connecticut Avenue NW, Suite 435,
Washington, DC 20036 | 202-499-7979 | FLL@thegabi.com | www.thegabi.com

STAY CONNECTED:

