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ICYMI: "A Commonsense Solution To Our Nation's Energy Dilemma"

WASHINGTON – Representative Byron Donalds (R-FL) and Bret Kugelmass, CEO of micro-modular nuclear energy developer, "Last Energy," co-published the following op-ed entitled, "[A Commonsense Solution To Our Nation's Energy Dilemma](#)" in the Washington Examiner. This op-ed details the importance of utilizing nuclear energy to solve our nation's long-term energy dilemma.

Read the full op-ed [here](#) or below:

A Commonsense Solution To Our Nation's Energy Dilemma

Representative Byron Donalds (R-FL) and Bret Kugelmass
[Washington Examiner](#) – April 2, 2024

As two Americans focused on energy issues, one as a member of Congress and another as an entrepreneur, we often find ourselves in debates about how to best power society in the 21st century. While many of these debates focus on things such as the price of electricity, the truth is America is facing a broader, more fundamental energy dilemma that could affect our nation for years to come.

Simply put, this dilemma breaks down into a series of interrelated challenges. One is the fact that [energy consumption will only increase](#) with population growth and expected higher usage of energy-intensive technologies, such as artificial intelligence and cloud storage.

The second challenge is energy security. As the world moves online and we become more globalized, the need for reliable, 24/7 baseload power will become mission-critical for every industry and organization.

Taken together, these raise a third, more fundamental challenge: finding energy sources that are abundant, can be produced domestically at scale, and, crucially, don't cost a fortune.

For some, the solution lies in trying to invent first-of-its-kind technologies. But in reality, we already have a proven resource: nuclear power.

As things stand, nuclear power provides [18.9%](#) of total annual electricity generation in the United States. This shouldn't be shocking — several decades ago, leaders such as Presidents John F. [Kennedy](#) and Richard [Nixon](#) called for America to double down on nuclear power. Even back then, they understood the unique benefits of nuclear: it has an exceptionally high energy-generating capacity, is abundant by being available simply through the laws of physics, and can therefore provide reliable power around the clock.

What we didn't mention are costs. As experts will attest, costs aren't a problem once plants are up and running, [at which point the price of nuclear energy is extremely affordable](#). But getting nuclear plants online has historically been synonymous with cost overruns and missed deadlines, which is why America's nuclear output and number of new facilities has [been stagnant for decades](#).

Reducing the cost of new nuclear development, therefore, is a precondition to unlocking America's nuclear power potential, and, ultimately, solving our nation's long-term energy dilemma.

As we've both said elsewhere, we can augment America's energy future by embracing advanced nuclear technology, specifically small modular reactors. While the term overlooks distinctions among reactors, plant designs, and business models, SMRs are — as the name suggests — smaller, simpler, and therefore easy and quick to build. Instead of being constructed like a big, complex castle, they snap together like a Lego set.

This lends itself to several advantages, including easier assembly, shorter construction timelines, and, subsequently, reduced costs. It also offers flexible siting. By virtue of their size and design, SMRs can be installed in more places than conventional nuclear power plants.

The question therefore becomes how to expeditiously deploy these systems. Ultimately, if we're going to produce the amount of nuclear energy needed to solve our nation's problems (and compete with emerging SMR leaders such as China and Russia), we'll need a multipronged playbook to increase SMR development and deployment.

This will require meaningful collaboration between the federal government and industry stakeholders. At minimum, Washington must create conditions that allow the nuclear industry, specifically new entrants, to invest, innovate, compete, and grow. That includes modernizing the nuclear licensing process to streamline compliance for advanced nuclear developers, in addition to reducing exorbitant regulatory costs, simplifying permitting rules, and building a robust U.S. nuclear supply chain.

Another element includes harnessing the unique advantages associated with siting SMRs. For example, the Department of Energy recently found that coal-fired power plant sites are often [designed in such a way that could be repurposed to house advanced nuclear systems, such as SMRs](#). DOE's analysis shows that, of the 157 retired U.S. coal plants, 80% of those locations are conducive for siting SMRs (keeping in mind that another [173 coal plants may retire by 2030](#)).

To be clear, neither of us believe that retrofitting all of America's currently operational coal facilities will be the silver bullet to realize the benefits of SMRs at scale. But where we have retired coal plants (or plants slated for retirement), innovation should be encouraged to replace old technological solutions with emerging ones. Not to mention the fact that advanced nuclear technology can leverage *existing* energy infrastructure, which should reduce costs and simplify regulatory requirements.

Washington has a responsibility to encourage private sector creativity, and legislation such as the [U.S. Capitol Power Plant Retrofit Act](#) would help do just that. By exploring the feasibility of SMRs in Congress's own backyard (i.e., retrofitting the Capitol's power plant with such technology), the federal government would send a strong signal to the industry that new approaches to old things are welcomed, and that advanced systems such as SMRs are poised to become the norm.

As the U.S. grapples with its long-term energy dilemma, we agree that the best solutions often require getting creative with the resources we already have. Nothing represents this idea better than advanced nuclear technology, which can help America unlock its energy potential.

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