

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5991

As of January 17, 2014

Title: An act relating to studying nuclear power as a replacement for electricity generated from the combustion of fossil fuels.

Brief Description: Studying nuclear power as a replacement for electricity generated from the combustion of fossil fuels.

Sponsors: Senators Ericksen, Sheldon, Hewitt, Brown, Mullet, Honeyford and Benton.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Energy, Environment & Telecommunications: 1/16/14.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY, ENVIRONMENT & TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Staff: William Bridges (786-7416)

Background: According to the federal Energy Information Agency, there are currently 65 commercially operating nuclear power plants with 104 nuclear reactors in 31 states around the country. These plants generate about 20 percent of U.S. electricity each year.

The Columbia Generating Station (CGS) near Richland, Washington is the Pacific Northwest's only commercially operating nuclear power plant. CGS is operated by Energy Northwest, a not-for-profit joint operating agency.

The entire output of CGS is marketed by the Bonneville Power Administration. According to the most recent state fuel mix report, CGS supplied about 4.7 percent of the electricity used by retail customers in the state in 2012.

Summary of Bill: Creating a Joint Select Taskforce on Nuclear Energy. The taskforce is created to study how the state can advance and support the generation of clean energy in the region through the use of nuclear power. The taskforce must report any findings and recommendations to the Legislature by December 1, 2014, and terminates on December 15, 2014.

Taskforce Membership. The taskforce must consist of eight members that serve on the legislative standing committees with primary jurisdiction over energy issues. The President of the Senate must appoint two members from the majority caucus and two members from

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the minority caucus. The Speaker of the House of Representatives must appoint two members from each caucus. Taskforce members must choose their own chair and officers from their own membership.

Meetings. The taskforce must hold no more than four meetings, with two of those meetings in Richland, Washington.

Staff. The taskforce must be staffed by nonpartisan staff of the Senate and House of Representatives. All expenses and hiring of additional staff must be approved by the Senate and House of Representatives.

Findings. The Legislature finds that nuclear power is a safe, reliable, cost-effective, and carbon-free source of electricity. Accordingly, the Legislature intends that nuclear power should be studied as a possible replacement for electricity consumed in the region that is generated from the combustion of fossil fuels.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: Yes.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: Nuclear power is a significant greenhouse gas-free energy source and a taskforce to study emerging nuclear technologies is timely. Energy Northwest and the Tri-City Development Council is working to demonstrate and commercialize small nuclear reactors designed in the northwest. Nuclear energy is a clean energy resource that is better than natural gas, and it can provide the baseload electricity needed to back up intermittent renewable resources.

CON: Nuclear energy uses more energy than it makes.

OTHER: Any study of nuclear energy should consider such factors as life-cycle costs, cost effectiveness, safety, waste disposal, and effects on water.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Debbie Bone-Harris, Franklin PUD; Dale Atkinson, Vice President, Energy NW.

CON: Jerry Dierker, citizen.

OTHER: Nancy Hirsh, NW Energy Coalition.