

General Convention of The Episcopal Church 2024 Archives' Research Report

Resolution No.: 2024-C029
Title: Supporting a Clean Energy Future
Proposer: Chicago
Topic: Environment

Directly Related: (Attached)

1991-D118 On the Topic of Nuclear Power (Rejected)

Indirectly Related: (Available in the [Acts of Convention](#) database, searchable by resolution number)

2022-A087 Commit to Net Carbon Neutrality by 2030
2022-A088 Re-Commit to Addressing Global Climate Change and Environmental Justice
2022-A089 Divest from Fossil Fuel Companies and Invest in Renewable Energy
2018-C020 Urge Support for Carbon Accounting Policies for Reduction of Greenhouse Gas Emissions

In preparing this report, the Archives researched the resolutions in the Acts of Convention database for the period 1973 through 2022, selecting “direct” resolutions that have a substantive bearing on the proposed legislation. The “direct” resolutions are attached and “indirect” resolutions are available in the Acts of Convention database. Committee members who require other research assistance should contact the Archives through the [Research Request Form](#).

C029 - Supporting a Clean Energy Future

Final Status: Not Yet Finalized

Proposed by: Chicago

Has Budget Implications: No

Cost:

Amends C&C or Rules of Order: No

Requests New Interim Body: No

Changes Mandate Of Existing Ib: No

Directs Dfms Staff: No

Directs Dioceses: No

Directs Executive Council: No

HiA: No House Assigned

Legislative Committee Currently Assigned: No Committee Assigned

Completion Status: Incomplete

Latest House Action: N/A

Supporting Documents: No

Resolution Text

Resolved, the House of _____ concurring,

That the 81st General Convention of the Episcopal Church endorse the use of carbon-free nuclear energy for replacing the use of fossil fuel, which, when achieved, will reduce pollution of the environment, reduce carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions, and increase the reliability and resilience of the power grid year-round and during extreme weather events; and be it further

Resolved, That by endorsing the use of carbon-free nuclear energy, the General Convention recognize that it is a valuable tool to replace the use of fossil fuels, reduce pollution in the environment and support a more just, equitable, and sustainable world for historically disadvantaged communities across the United States and the world, especially in developing countries; and be it further

Resolved, That the endorsement of carbon-free nuclear energy extends to keeping existing nuclear power plants online to complement other clean energy sources, so to avoid increased fossil fuel use that would occur from premature closures of nuclear power plants.

Explanation

The use of fossil fuels to power our daily lives has provided many benefits to society, but achieving these benefits has come at a steep cost. Burning these substances to generate electricity is one of the biggest contributors to atmospheric CO2 emissions, which result in the climate warming. There is consensus among climate scientists, including the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), that this warming is leading to changes in weather patterns that could negatively impact the most vulnerable people. As we are called to speak out and act on behalf of "the least of these," we must take seriously our role as moral authority, and advocate for solutions that can reduce and/or mitigate the harm caused by fossil fuel use. This is especially important and appropriate given the benefits that we have enjoyed, and continue to enjoy, from our own use of fossil fuels.

While it may not seem to be the church's place to delve deeply into energy policy discussions, when there are opportunities to alter the discussion and effect positive change, it is appropriate for the church to "weigh in." This is already done in many policy areas -- affordable housing; capital punishment; health care, as examples -- and energy policy, which affects so many aspects of our society, is certainly a good candidate for well-reasoned advocacy. This would simply add to the advocacy efforts already being made in various corners of our denomination to encourage use of clean energy solutions like solar panels.

Nuclear energy, like all we have, is a gift from God, and it has many benefits:

1. Nuclear energy is clean and produces less waste than any other energy source, including renewables. Nuclear generation is emissions-free and avoids more pollution per megawatt-hour than other sources. Nuclear energy also has the lowest lifecycle emissions among all energy sources (or lifetime CO2 "footprint") as other energy sources, including wind and solar, require more energy use for mining, component production and transportation. In total, nuclear energy generates over half of America's low-carbon electricity and nearly a third of the world's low-carbon electricity.
2. Nuclear energy is our most reliable source of electricity generation; generating large amounts of emissions-free power 24/7 year-round, and is dispatchable and fuel secured. Nuclear energy's unique capabilities complement weather-dependent, intermittent renewables by shoring up the power grid's reliability without increasing emissions. This is important because society requires electricity that is always there when we need it, especially during winter storms, heat waves and hurricanes. Whether it is our lights at home, or a ventilator at a hospital, or a factory employing hundreds or thousands of people, a large part of the value of our electric grid lies in it being reliable. Further, when the grid is unreliable, it is those with the least means that suffer the most ill effects. One need only visit areas of the world where the electricity cannot be counted on being there, to see the devastating effects a sometimes-on electric grid has on people's ability to live safe, healthy and productive lives. Finally, without reliability, there is no equity. Those with means can afford to mitigate the effects of unreliable power. They can afford emergency backup generators, hotel rooms and other expenses required when the power goes out, but most low-income people do not have these options. They are the ones that suffer most when the power goes out.

3. Nuclear energy is safe and highly regulated. It is the safest form of electricity generation that we have, comparable to wind energy in terms of safety.
4. Nuclear energy has a small environmental "footprint." Nuclear power plants generate huge amounts of electricity while requiring very little land. Wind turbines require 360 times more land to generate the same amount of electricity from a typical nuclear reactor. As such, nuclear energy conserves land, especially farmland, from unnecessary development. The area around nuclear power plants often serves as a wildlife preserve, protecting endangered animals and the local environment.
5. Nuclear energy's waste output is small – all of America's commercial nuclear waste produced since the 1950s could fit inside a Walmart – and is easily and safely managed. Used nuclear fuel from existing power reactors can be recycled, buried in deep geological repositories or stored for future use – as it still contains most of the energy it started with. We have multiple options for the final disposition of used nuclear fuel, so it is a political issue, not a safety or engineering problem.
6. Nuclear energy has already been used to rapidly decarbonize large, state-sized grids (e.g., France, Sweden, Ontario). We have experience replacing fossil fuels with nuclear energy. It's been done before and can be done again with reactor designs being built today.
7. Nuclear energy advances environmental, social, and racial justice. Along with conserving land and avoiding emissions, nuclear power plants generate large amounts of tax revenue for local municipalities and local school districts, supply a reliable source of clean baseload power for hospitals, homes, and industries, and offer good-paying multi-generational jobs for working families. Nuclear power plants mean good-paying jobs that last decades.
8. Nuclear energy fosters energy security. Instead of depending on potentially hostile regimes to provide fuels such as natural gas, coal, or oil, having nuclear energy requires only a relatively small amount of uranium-based fuel that can be procured far in advance. A nuclear reactor can run for 18 months to 2 years on just two or three truckloads of fuel assemblies. Compare this to fossil fuel power plants that require a 100-car coal train daily or a constant flow of methane (natural gas), which could be cut off without notice. This allows governments to pursue foreign policy goals without the potential repercussions of holding bad actors to account.

This resolution singles out nuclear energy as worthy of the Church's attention because of these benefits, which illustrate why it represents possibly our most potent tool to reduce the use of fossil fuels. However, the church's attitude toward nuclear energy has generally not been supportive. This is not a reasonable position to take, given the scale of the task at hand (mitigating climate change while providing energy to billions of additional people). It is time for the church to embrace and endorse nuclear energy, given the dire need for as much clean energy as we can produce, with 80% of the world's primary energy still coming from burning fossil fuels.

We recognize that nuclear energy has been a very fraught subject, and many have objections to its expanded use. Below are some resources that we have found helpful in shaping our understanding of the subject. These pieces shed additional light on the cleanliness, safety, and economics of nuclear power. We would encourage their review by all Members of the Convention before we discuss this resolution.

Why Nuclear Power Must Be Part of the Energy Solution – Richard Rhodes

<https://e360.yale.edu/features/why-nuclear-power-must-be-part-of-the-energy-solution-environmentalists-climate>

The discreet charm of nuclear power – The Economist (free, but registration required)

<https://www.economist.com/leaders/2021/11/13/the-discreet-charm-of-nuclear-power>

Nuclear power: why is it so unpopular? – The Economist

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-sjo1B3j_JM&t=6s

OUTCOMES

A pro-nuclear energy statement from the church will provide openings for discussing this vital option for providing our sisters and brothers across the globe with clean, reliable, affordable energy without the global warming and air pollution side effects. While other clean energy sources such as solar and wind can also help, there is no shortage of advocates for those technologies. In addition, they are limited by their diffuse nature, and their intermittency, and by themselves, will not be able to power a modern society.

Note: this resolution and/or its explanation contains external references, such as URLs of websites, that may not be in the required languages of General Convention. Because of copyright restrictions, the General Convention cannot provide translations. However, your web browser may be able to provide a machine translation into another language. If you need assistance with this, please contact gc.support@episcopalchurch.org.



Resolution Number: 1991-D118
Title: On the Topic of Nuclear Power
Legislative Action Taken: Rejected
Text of Resolution:

Whereas, The continued use of fossil fuels damages the ozone layer and contributes to global warming; and

Whereas, The continued use of fossil fuels leads to pressures for the exploration and despoiling of precious natural land reserves in the Arctic and elsewhere; and

Whereas, Continued dependence on foreign oil hurts the American economy and puts this country at the potential mercy of foreign rulers; therefore be it

Resolved, the House of Bishops concurring, That the 70th General Convention of the Episcopal Church support efforts to explore the peaceful uses of nuclear power through its progressive development as a source of electric power for the United States.