

# The Columbus Dispatch

---

Opinion

## **Column: Yes, keep plants open to generate clean electricity**

Posted May 6, 2018 at 5:00 AM

Last year, Gov. John Kasich rejected a state legislature bill that would have weakened Ohio's clean-energy standard. In his veto message, Kasich explained, "Ohio workers cannot afford to take a step backward from the economic gains that we have made in recent years, however, and arbitrarily limiting Ohio's energy generation options amounts to self-inflicted damage to both our state's near- and long-term economic competitiveness." Unfortunately, Ohio finds itself on the verge of exactly the predicament the governor wanted to avoid.

FirstEnergy has announced it will close the Davis-Besse and Perry nuclear power plants in Ohio, along with the Beaver Valley plant in Pennsylvania. This announcement, although anticipated, is unfortunate, and represents a step backward for clean and reliable energy in the state.

Nuclear energy is far and away the largest source of carbon-free electricity generation in the United States, producing nearly 60 percent of our carbon-free electricity. Nuclear plants also avoid spewing pollutants into the air that contribute to asthma and other lung and heart diseases. When the nuclear plants shut down, most or all of the lost electricity generation will be replaced by fossil fuels. The result will be the people of Ohio breathing dirtier air and exposure to increased risks of climate change.

Losing FirstEnergy's nuclear plants will also increase costs to customers and increase the vulnerability of our electricity system to disruption from supply shortfalls, accidents, terrorism and extreme weather events. Nuclear plants are our most reliable source of electricity and they aren't subject to the fuel shortages and price spikes that struck the Northeast this winter. Shutting them down will leave Ohio with an electricity supply system that is less resilient, more vulnerable and less secure.

Local residents and communities near the plants also will be hit hard. The 2,400 men and women who work at these plants will lose their livelihoods, and the people and businesses around the plants will lose a major driver of local economic activity. Today, towns with a recently closed plant in Illinois, Wisconsin, Vermont and Florida are seeing falling property values, plummeting tax receipts and insufficient school funding.

Finally, these announcements erode U.S. global leadership in nuclear technology and threaten our national security. Other nations want to buy nuclear products and services from U.S. companies. When our companies do business in other nations, it affords the U.S. great leverage in ensuring those nations operate to the highest standards of safety and security. If we allow our domestic nuclear-energy sector to atrophy, our companies will be less competitive, and we'll have less influence over the nuclear programs in other nations. We see how well that has worked for us in North Korea and Iran.

Nuclear-plant shutdowns occur because the benefits provided by nuclear power plants are not broadly recognized and compensated in electricity markets. This is a problem that can be solved. Illinois, New York, and Connecticut have taken action to value nuclear energy and preserve several nuclear power plants. The American Nuclear Society urges Ohio policymakers to closely examine the policies enacted by those states and take action to recognize and reward the valuable benefits of nuclear energy.

*Bob Coward is president of the American Nuclear Society and principal officer of MPR Associates. He is a leader in the area of nuclear power and the safe and reliable operation of the U.S. nuclear power fleet.*