

Sen. Edward Markey (D-Mass.)

I understand this legislation is important to many members of the committee but we should not give a boost to the nuclear industry without commensurately confronting the longstanding issues of how to deal with nuclear waste and nuclear decommissioning.

If we support new plants with reactors without addressing the needs of operating reactors and affected communities, we will be adding radioactive fuel to a fire and making out existing problems worse.

The Advance Act takes unprecedented steps to have the Nuclear Regulatory Commission promote nuclear exports. Not simply nuclear safety, which is its core mission, all to prop up the ailing U.S. nuclear industry at home and abroad. And I remain deeply concerned about this extension of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's mission.

It's supposed to be a regulator. Other agencies are supposed to be promoting American commerce. That's not the job of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission! Its job is to promote safety, it's to ensure these plants are safe! That's what happened back in 1974. We broke the Nuclear Regulatory Commission off from the Atomic Energy Commission so there would be separate missions, separate goals, separate responsibilities.

And now, to turn the Nuclear Regulatory Commission into an agency that's promoting a technology it's supposed to be regulating begins to blur this role, especially as we're talking about exports overseas.

I'm also concerned that in section 103 of this legislation it could allow the NRC to skirt the critical nonproliferation safeguards in this bill and unilaterally approve an export license for foreign countries to receive nuclear materials.

That could present a significant nonproliferation risk and put a domestic nuclear safety agency in charge of important national security decisions.

With all due respect to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, the commission was never meant to be in the business of deciding if Saudi Arabia gets nuclear materials. We're blurring the historic role that this agency plays.

This legislation is not wise.

We have to keep these lines strong.

Moreover, I'm concerned that section 104, I'm concerned that section 104 has an overly expansive definition of embarking civil nuclear nations. We need to be much more cautious when exporting such risky and dangerous technologies.

And while some of the bill's supporters argue we need new nuclear technologies to combat the climate crisis, I have an arched eyebrow as to why this bill focuses solely on nuclear energy and not on other zero-emissions technology such as wind and solar and geothermal which is what our country should be promoting around the rest of the world.

It's also shortsighted to me to make such a herculean effort to promote new nuclear technologies when we're yet to solve the longstanding problems resulting from our existing nuclear fleet.

To this day, the Navajo nation is dealing with the legacy of uranium contamination, including more than 500 abandoned uranium mines and homes and water sources polluted with elevated levels of radiation.

And while section 405 of the advance act notices this ongoing concern, the funding authorized in this legislation will not address the full legacy of radioactive pollution.

Providing a capped level of authorized funding for communities dealing with this radioactive legacy contrasts greatly with section 202 of the bill, which allows for nuclear companies to receive an uncapped award for licensing costs.

So it is deeply disappointing to me that we're capping costs for cleanup but not capping prizes for technologies that will likely rely on uranium, which caused this pollution in the first place.

And additionally, while this bill provides some funding to assist communities impacted by the closure of impending nuclear power plants, it does not include legislative proposals that would fully address the concerns of communities struggling to overcome the social and economic burden of indefinitely hosting stranded nuclear waste when there is no longterm storage solution in sight.

Communities have become de facto nuclear storage facilities, endangering them, their families, and the environment.

These communities, including those in Massachusetts, around the Pilgrim Nuclear Power Station, deserve more funding, a meaningful say in the decommissioning process and a real pathway to consent-based, long term storage for our nation's spent nuclear fuel.

And that's why I've supported and introduced legislation in the past like the Nuclear Waste Task Force Act and the Dry Storage Act and Sen. Sanders' Nuclear Plant Decommissioning Act.

Chairman Carper, I want to work with you as we're moving forward between here and the floor, I think that there are many problems with this legislation, there are real nuclear non proliferation issues here.

We know that there are countries around the world, including Saudi Arabia, that have potential instability and we don't want to wind up in a situation where nuclear power plants have been sold to North Korea which then turn into nuclear bomb factories! Or nuclear power plants that have been sold to Iraq which then turn into nuclear bomb factories! Or in the instance of Iran, we were going to sell six nuclear power plants to Iran in the late 70s and had already finished that deal before the Shah of Iran fell.

Can you imagine if they had six nuclear power plants that had already been constructed with U.S. aid in the 1970s before the Shah fell?

Well that's what we're talking about here!

And I just want to make sure we understand that as we are going to become nuclear Johnny Appleseeds [miming the gesture of scattering apple tree seeds in front of him] and encouraging the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to be promoting this nuclear technology around the world with lower safeguards in terms of what the protections are, then yes, in the short term, the nuclear industry will reap the financial benefits of it but inevitably inexorably, the world will reap the whirlwind, okay? And the next Ayatollah or equivalent, somewhere in the world, would then have access to the nuclear materials that could hold the whole world hostage.

So from my perspective, I just think a lot more thought has to go into this legislation, safeguards have to be included and I just want to have an opportunity to be able to work with you, Mr. Chairman, and the ranking member, to build in those safeguards.