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“How Cuomo’s $7.6 Billion Nuclear Bail-out Can Impede Wind and Solar”

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It was nearly 40 years ago that as a journalist I began concentrating on nuclear power.

The preface: I hosted a TV program—“Long Island World”—in the 1970s on WLIW/21, Long Island’s PBS station, and was asked to do one on nuclear power. With my crew I visited Brookhaven National Laboratory set up on Long Island in 1947 by the U. S. Atomic Energy Commission to conduct research into atomic science and develop civilian uses of nuclear technology. The labs such as Los Alamos built during World War II as part of the atomic bomb-making program, Manhattan Project, which the AEC succeeded, would continue working on military uses of atomic technology. And here on Long Island this new lab would focus on developing and promoting civilian uses—extending what was done during the war.

The scientists at Brookhaven Lab I interviewed downplayed the dangers of nuclear power. They said to the camera that there might be a minor accident over many years but nuclear power plants were extremely safe because of having redundant systems.

Then in 1979 the Three Mile Island accident—no minor accident—happened. And hearing the news, I thought of those scientists and how they tried to bamboozle me and TV viewers.

I committed myself that day to writing a book, based on investigative reporting, presenting the realities of nuclear power.
A description used in the Investigative Reporting class I’ve taught and in many other classes in Investigative Reporting is that it’s an effort through journalism to tell “how things really work.”

**Cover Up**

It took a year to write the book. Those who assisted me included atomic physicist Dr. Richard Webb. He read every word of the manuscript. Dr. Webb served under Admiral Hyman Rickover in the construction of the first U.S. nuclear power plant, Shippingport, in Pennsylvania, and authored the book *The Accident Hazards of Nuclear Power Plants*. Other journalists reviewed what I found including John Rather who for many years reported for *The New York Times*.

The book was titled *Cover Up: What You Are Not Supposed to Know About Nuclear Power*. The latest edition, issued after the Fukushima nuclear catastrophe began, is available for free, courtesy of the publisher, on my website, [www.karlgrossman.com](http://www.karlgrossman.com)

*Cover Up* was the first of several books I’ve written on nuclear technology. I’ve written thousands of articles, too, and hosted and written many TV programs on nuclear power broadcast on the nationally-aired TV program I’ve hosted for 27 years, *Enviro Close-Up*.

Since *Cover Up*’s publication in 1980, I’ve also been on the lecture circuit—including being paired by my lecture agency with a leading advocate of nuclear power, John Sununu, the former New Hampshire governor. I’ve spoken at colleges and universities across the U.S. and also overseas, including making presentations in six trips to Russia in the 1990s and early 2000s as Russia sought to create a new energy program—before Vladimir Putin’s iron fist came down. My last presentation in Russia, a keynote address at a conference in Siberia on nuclear power, in
Tomsk, a so-called “atomic city,” a center of Russian nuclear activity, was supported by the U.S. State Department.

I start Cover Up declaring: “You have not been informed about nuclear power. You have not been told. And that has been done on purpose. Keeping the public in the dark was deemed necessary by the promoters of nuclear power if it was to succeed. Those in government, science and private industry who have been pushing nuclear power realized that if people were given the facts, if they knew the consequences of nuclear power, they would not stand for it.”

“Equal to that of the State of Pennsylvania”

For example, although those Brookhaven Lab scientists downplayed the dangers of nuclear power, studies I obtained from BNL itself projected huge and dire consequences of an accident. For example, over and over again in BNL’s report, WASH-740 Update, is the line that “the possible size of the area of such a disaster might be equal to that of the State of Pennsylvania.” This was written a decade before the Three Mile Island accident almost turned that BNL projection into fact.

I reprint in Cover Up this line and many other passages from government documents on the dangers of nuclear power as facsimiles—reprinting the actual documents themselves—so nuclear promoter could not deny them.

Covering up, deception, continue today.

The push for nuclear power has been—and is—a huge con job, one of the biggest the world has ever seen. From the claim of Atomic Energy Commission Chairman Lewis Strauss that nuclear power would be “too cheap to meter,” to the insistence of nuclear promoters through the years that nuclear plants are safe, to what the some nuclear scientists have advanced as the
“hormesis” theory—that radioactivity is good for you; it exercises the immune system—the falsehoods run deep. It almost makes the tobacco industry look like pikers.

**$7.6 Billion Bail-out Plan**

And now we have in New York State a $7.6 billion plan advanced by Governor Andrew Cuomo and supported by the state’s Public Service Commission, the members of which the governor appoints, to bail out four aged upstate nuclear power plants.

The bail-out would be part of a program that includes a “Clean Energy Standard” under which 50 percent of electricity used in New York by 2030 would come from “clean and renewable energy sources”

To subsidize the upstate nuclear plants, there would be a surcharge for 12 years on electric bills paid by the state’s residential and industrial customers. Business owners, because of their larger use of electricity, would be particularly hard hit.

Nuclear power is dirty, dangerous and expensive—very expensive. And these days, nuclear power cannot compete economically.

As Jessica Azulay, program director of the state’s Alliance for a Green Economy, explains about the bailout: “Without these subsidies, nuclear plants cannot compete with renewable energy and will close. But under the guise of ‘clean energy,’ the nuclear industry is about to get its hands on our money in order to save its own profits, at the expense of public health and safety.”

What are the arguments made by the bail-out plan’s promoters?

The four nuclear plants are needed to offset climate change. A nuclear plant doesn’t emit carbon or greenhouse gasses, they say, a key nuclear industry argument in a time of great concern over climate change for nuclear plants nationally and worldwide. What is never
mentioned by these nuclear promoters, however, is that the “nuclear cycle” or “nuclear chain”—the full nuclear system—is a major contributor of carbon emissions and greenhouse gasses.

“Nuclear is NOT emission-free!”

As Manna Jo Greene, environmental director of the Hudson River Sloop Clearwater, wrote to the state Public Service Commission on this: “Nuclear is NOT emission-free! The claim of nuclear power having ‘zero-emission attributes’ ignores emissions generated in mining, milling, enriching, transporting and storing nuclear fuel.”

Or as Michel Lee, head of the Council on Intelligent Energy & Conservation Policy, told the PSC: “Nuclear power is not carbon-free. If one stage,” reactor operation itself, “produces minimal carbon…every other stage produces prodigious amounts.” Thus the nuclear “industry is a big climate change polluter…Nuclear power is actually a chain of highly energy-intensive industrial processes which—combined—consume large amounts of fossil fuels and generate potent warming gasses. These include: uranium mining, milling enrichment, fuel fabrication, transport” and her list went on.

To combat climate change what’s needed is really green energy led by solar and wind.

Then there is the argument that the 2,000 jobs in the four upstate plants must be saved.

But as Dr. Mark Z. Jacobson, professor of civil and environmental engineering and director of the Atmosphere/Energy Program at Stanford University, wrote in an op-ed in Albany Times Union, “allowing the upstate nuclear plants to close now and replacing them with equal energy output from…wind and solar power would be cheaper and would create more jobs.” The closure of the upstate plants “would jeopardize fewer than 2,000 jobs, approximately half of which would remain for years because of the required decommissioning and decontamination of the facilities and the securing and monitoring of the nuclear waste.” A “peer-reviewed study” he
has done “about converting New York State to 100 percent clean, renewable energy—which is entirely possible now—would create a net of approximately 82,000 good, long-term jobs above the number lost,” he said.

Dr. Jacobson also stated that “I was among many who were shocked by the Public Service Commission’s proposal that the lion’s share of the Clean Energy Standard funding would be a nuclear bailout.”

And there’s the claim the power the upstate nuclear plants provide is needed for continuity of supply. Not true, says as Michel Lee, head of the Council on Intelligent Energy & Conservation Policy, “Upstate New York is flush with energy,” she notes.

**Renewable Energy Revolution**

And, moreover, there is a renewable energy revolution now well underway.

Just last month, for example, a new firm, Insolight, announced development of solar photovoltaic panels with 36% efficiency. The most advanced solar panels NASA uses in space have 25% efficiency. When I wrote *Cover Up*, the efficiency of solar panels was in the single digits. Now most are 18% to 20%, and the SunPower company last year began manufacturing panels with 24% “world record” efficiency. With such jumps in efficiency, less space for panels is needed. More panels can be deployed harvesting more sunlight and converting it to electricity. Meanwhile, the price of solar panels has gone down dramatically.

Wind has become the world’s fastest growing energy resource.

Deepwater Wind is now completing America’s first offshore windfarm east of Long Island. It seeks to follow that up with a 200-turbine windfarm south of Long Island—the turbines placed beyond the horizon so there’s no aesthetic issue as there has
been in early offshore windfarm plans. Then Deepwater Wind seeks to build a 200-windfarm south of New York City off New Jersey.

Here on Long Island the Town of East Hampton is moving ahead to have 100% of its electricity come from safe, clean, green, renewable energy by 2020. That’s just four years away!

East Hampton Town Supervisor Larry Cantwell says: “Making the switch to clean energy is just the right thing to do, both for the environment and for keeping more money in the local economy and creating jobs here.”

“We’re doing it!,” he told me recently:

East Hampton is to meet its 100% renewable energy goal through solar energy, from panels on town-owned land and rooftops, and from wind energy from Deepwater Wind’s off-shore wind turbines.

East Hampton has become the first municipality on the East Coast to adopt a 100% renewable energy goal but other governments in the U.S.—including cities such as San Francisco—have done the same, as have nations around the world.

Every town on Long Island and through New York State could do it, too. There’d be different mixes—like there needs to be different mixes globally depending on energy resources, although solar power runs through all.

“The World Can Transition…”

“The World Can Transition to 100% Clean, Renewable Energy,” declares the website of The Solutions Project headquartered in California. “Together ,” it continues, “we can build a stronger economy, healthier families, and a more secure future. 100% clean is 100% possible. Join us.” The website—http://thesolutionsproject.org—is full of information on 100% renewable energy programs happening.
Among the articles: “139 Countries Could Be 100% Renewable by 2050.” The Solutions Project, supported by leading U.S. foundations including the Park Foundation, last month launched “The Fighter Fund, a new grant-making program for community-based groups on the front lines of the fight for clean energy and climate justice.”

And a fight is occurring. “Holding Clean Energy Hostage,” was the title of a recent article by Cathy Kunkel of the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis and M.V. Ramana of the Program on Science and Global Security at Princeton University in the journal *Reason in Revolt*. Companies tied to “traditional” energy—nuclear, coal, oil, gas—seek to block “renewable energy every step of the way.”

The sun does not send bills.

Neither does the wind.

Once the infrastructure for renewable energy is built, energy flows—freely. And this threatens the old power order.

But there are new companies—like Insolight and Deepwater Wind—making huge advances in renewable energy technologies that the old order can’t put a lid on.

Regarding wind, the United Kingdom has just given the go-ahead for what’s to be the world’s largest offshore wind farm. An this August 7, Scottish wind turbines generated “the total amount of electricity used by every home and business” in Scotland, reported the U.K. newspaper *The Independent*.

There are big advances in energy storage—to end criticism of renewable energy being intermittent. “Holy Grail of Energy Policy in Sight as Battery Technology Smashes the Old Order,” was the recent headline of the U.K. newspaper *The Telegraph*. Storage is a component of the Deepwater Wind bringing electricity to Long Island.
Said Bill Nye, the “Science Guy,” on CNN recently: “There’s enough wind and solar to power the world.”

And there are other renewable sources including those involving water—tidal power and wave power as we see daily on Long Island, now being tapped around the world, biomass, geothermal and on and on.

East Hampton by “setting these bold renewable energy goals,” says Gordian Raacke, executive director of Renewable Energy Long Island, is “a visionary leader in the fight against climate change and an example of how we can all become part of the solution.”

**“Imagine what New York could do if Cuomo...”**

Says Jessica Azulay of Alliance for a Green Economy: “Imagine what New York could do if Cuomo would go all-in on the thriving renewable energy sector instead of dumping more money into the nuclear industry. We could put more funding into wind and solar…and make tens of thousands of homes more energy efficient, creating jobs and saving people money. We could put real dollars into the geothermal industry and get ourselves off fracked gas and other fossil fuels…We’d save money to help with worker retraining and transitioning communities into the green economy. In short, we could accelerate our transition to 100 percent renewable energy, getting there faster, cheaper and safer.”

The Cuomo $7.6 billion nuclear bail-out plan, as Blair Horner, legislator director of the New York Public Interest Research Group, says “is like subsidizing the horse-and-buggy industry while Henry Ford is rolling cars off the assembly line.”

**Beyond Dollars—It’s About Life**

And this, most importantly, is beyond dollars—it’s about life.
The most comprehensive study of the consequences of a nuclear plant meltdown with loss of containment was done for the U.S. Nuclear Regulation Commission, which succeeded the Atomic Energy Commission, by Sandia National Laboratories in 1982. It’s title: *Calculation of Reactor Accident Consequences* or *CRAC2*.

The study projected “peak early fatalities,” “peak early injuries,” peak cancer deaths” and “scaled costs” in the billions of dollars for such a meltdown at every nuclear plant in the United States. In “scaled costs” the study itemizes “lost wages, relocation expenses, decontamination costs, lost property” but it is noted that “the cost of providing health care for the affected population” is not included. The nuclear industry and nuclear promoters in government were so upset with the release of this analysis that I doubt there will ever be anything like it again. I’ve distributed a breakdown of the *CRAC2* numbers done by the House Subcommittee on Oversight & Investigations for your review.

The figures—and we’re speaking here of lives not mere numbers—for the four nuclear plants that would be bailed out under the Cuomo plan are:

**Ginna** -- 2,000 fatalities, 28,000 injuries, 14,000 cancer deaths and $63 billion in costs—based on the value of the 1980 dollar. It would be three times that now.

**FitzPatrick** – 1,000 fatalities, 16,000 injuries, 17,000 cancer deaths and $103 billion in costs.

**Nine Mile Point** which consists of two nuclear power plants.

**Unit 1** -- 700 fatalities, 11,000 injuries, 14,000 cancer deaths, $66 billion in costs.

And **Nine Mile Point 2** – 1,400 fatalities, 2,600 injuries, 20,000 cancer deaths, $134 billion in costs.
Also, as we have seen from Three Mile Island, Chernobyl and Fukushima, nuclear accidents are not rare events, like the BNL scientists told me, and not minor. With a little more than 400 nuclear power plants in the world, 100 in the U.S., disaster has occurred nearly every decade.

And if the next nuclear disaster is to strike anywhere, it could easily happen at these four old nuclear plants. Nuclear plants were only seen as operating for 40 years. After that, the metals would become embrittled from radioactivity creating unsafe conditions. So they were given 40-year operating licenses. But the Nuclear Regulatory Commission has gone ahead in recent times and given 20-year license extensions to now more than 80 of the nuclear plants in the U.S.—including the four upstate plants. This would allow them to run for 60 years. And the NRC is considering having an additional license extension program to allow nuclear plants to run for 80 years. It’s just asking for disaster. Considering taking a 60-year car on to the LIE or an Interstate and driving it at full speed—and that’s also part of the NRC program, allowing the nuclear plants given extensions to “uprate”—run hotter and harder to produce more electricity.

In terms of age, Nine Mile Point Unit 1 went online in 1969 and is one of the two oldest nuclear plants in the U.S., tied with Oyster Creek in New Jersey. Ginna started operating in 1970. FitzPatrick in 1975. These are from-the-past machines prone to mishap.

**Excelon: 800 Pound Nuclear Gorilla**

But there’s an 800 pound nuclear gorilla heavily involved in the bail-out plan—a company called Excelon. It’s the major owner of three of the plants—Ginna and the two Nine Mile Point plants—and Excelon has made a $110 million deal to buy FitzPatrick from Entergy with the bail-out deal in mind.
I’ve written articles on Excelon and notably its role in President Barack Obama’s flip on nuclear power. Running for his first term as president Obama declared: “I start off with the premise that nuclear energy is not optimal and so I am not a nuclear proponent. My general view is that until we can make certain that nuclear power plants are safe, that they have solved the storage problem…and the whole industry can show that they can produce clean, safe energy without enormous subsidies from the U.S. government, I don’t think that’s the best option. I am much more interested in solar and wind…”

Or as he told the editorial board of the Keene Sentinel in 2007: “I don’t think that there’s anything that we inevitably dislike about nuclear power. We just dislike the fact that it might blow up…and irradiate us...and kill us.”

Then, after his election, he began talking about “building a new generation of safe, clean nuclear power plants in this county.”

What happened in between? Key influences on Obama on nuclear power were Rahm Emanuel, who became his chief of staff, and as an investment banker was in the middle in 1999 of the $8.2 billion merger of Commonwealth Edison of Chicago and Peco Energy to put together Excelon, and there was David Axelrod, who became Obama’s senior advisor, who had been an Excelon PR consultant. Obama also received sizeable campaign contributions from Excelon executives. Indeed, Forbes magazine in 2010 ran a piece on Excelon and Obama headlined: “The President’s Utility.”

Excelon is now the biggest nuclear utility in the U.S.

Its fingerprints are on the $7.6 billion nuclear bail-out deal. As a filing with the PSC by a coalition of groups including Physicians for Social Responsibility, Indian Point Safe Energy Coalition, the Council on Intelligent Energy & Conservation Policy, Sierra Club-Lower Hudson
Valley, and public officials, states: “There have been constant ongoing closed door negotiations with Entergy and Excelon nuclear reactor owners, discussing ways to protect and subsidize New York State’s nuclear industry….Some sort of deal for Excelon to purchase the FitzPatrick reactor from Entergy was worked out.” The “deal was predicated on the [Public Service] Commission approving the ratepayer subsidies…to bolster Fitzpatrick and the other financially failing nuclear plants in upstate New York.”

The two Indian Point nuclear power plants 26 miles north of New York City—45 miles west of us here today—are not now included in the bail-out plan. Governor Cuomo says he wants to those plants closed citing their danger. But, notes Jessica Azulay of Alliance for a Green Economy, the plan “leaves the door open to subsidies” for them and this would mean “the costs [of the bail-out] will rise to over $10 billion.”

Rickover: “Outlaw Nuclear Reactors”

The bottom line when it comes to nuclear power comes from Admiral Rickover, considered the “father” of the U.S. nuclear navy as well as being in charge of building Shippingport. When he retired from the Navy in 1982 he addressed a Congressional committee and said—his remarks are included in Cover Up—that until several billion years ago “it was impossible to have any life on Earth; that is, there was so much radiation on Earth you couldn’t have any life—fish or anything. “ Then, “gradually, “the amount of radiation on this planet and probably in the entire system reduced and made it possible for some form of life to begin.”

“Now,” he went on, by utilizing nuclear power “we are creating something which nature tried to destroy to make life possible…every time you produce radiation,” a “horrible force” is unleashed, “in some cases for billions of years.” In other words, nuclear power plants recreate
the very radioactive poisons that precluded life from existing. “And,” said Rickover, “I think there the human race is going to wreck itself.”

We must, for the sake of life, Rickover told the Congressional committee, “outlaw nuclear reactors.”

Rickover, deeply involved in nuclear technology, finally saw—as we all must—the light.