

Fred Upton, One of the Nuclear Power Industry's Best Friends in Congress

Fred Upton (Republican-MI's 6th District) is a top cheerleader for the nuclear power industry in the U.S. House of Representatives. While ignoring safety and security risks at atomic reactors in southwest Michigan, Upton has championed nuclear power expansion plans. Upton has led the promotion of such nuclear power industry priorities as the Yucca Mountain dumpsite for high-level radioactive wastes, massive subsidies and tax breaks for the construction of new atomic reactors, and even a revival of reprocessing that would risk nuclear weapons proliferation overseas. Upton has received many hundreds of thousands of dollars in campaign contributions from electric utilities, the energy/natural resources sector, and the nuclear power industry, both from Political Action Committees (PACs) and individuals.

Upton's "Illusion of a Solution" to the Radioactive Waste Problem

- From 1995 to 2000, Upton was the primary sponsor of dead end bills attempting to rush high-level radioactive wastes to the proposed dumpsite at earthquake plagued Yucca Mountain, Nevada. President Bill Clinton vetoed such bills, once and for all, on the anniversary of Chernobyl in April 2000.
- Even after that, right up to the present, Upton has continued to introduce various "Fix Yucca" bills, which would do away with any remaining public health and environmental protections that stand in the way of opening the dump.
- Upton's attempts to rush the nation's high-level radioactive wastes to geologically unsuitable, Native American lands in Nevada would result in many hundreds of risky barge shipments on Lake Michigan, and potentially thousands of truck and train shipments through southwest Michigan. These shipments would risk catastrophic "Mobile Chernobyl" accidents or even "dirty bomb on wheels" terrorist attacks.

Radioactive Risks Piling Up on the Lake Michigan Shoreline

- Upton has referred to the concrete and steel silos storing Palisades nuclear power plant's overflowing high-level radioactive wastes 150 yards from the water of Lake Michigan in Covert near South Haven as "state-of-the-art dry cask technology." But these casks cannot be safely unloaded. One with defective welds has sat fully loaded on the beach for over 16 years now. This type of cask even suffered a dangerous explosion in Wisconsin, with similar "hydrogen ignition events" at Palisades itself. The dry casks will degrade further as time goes on, eventually risking leaks.
- Palisades' atomic waste containers, built on sand dunes, are at extreme risk from erosion and even earthquakes. Casks that, due to natural disaster or accident, sink to the bottom of Lake Michigan, could experience a nuclear chain reaction in the still-fissile fuel rods they hold. That would make emergency response a suicide mission, making already disastrous releases of hazardous radioactivity into the waters of Lake Michigan even worse.
- Upton's support for un-ending operations at the Palisades and Cook nuclear power plants in southwest Michigan encourages the addition of about 75 tons of irradiated nuclear fuel each year to the 2,000 tons that have already piled up over the decades at just those two sites, creating "de facto permanent" radioactive waste dumps on the shore of Lake Michigan. The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) has recently ruled that these high-level radioactive wastes could stay on-site at the reactors for a total of 120 years, or even longer.

Risky Relapse into Reprocessing

- Upton fully embraced the George W. Bush administration's "Global Nuclear Energy Partnership," which would have revived plutonium extraction from commercial irradiated nuclear fuel for the first time since 1972 in the U.S.
- After India diverted "atoms for peace" technology and know-how from Canada and the U.S. to explode its first atomic bomb in 1974, Presidents Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter banned commercial waste reprocessing in order to set a nuclear weapons non-proliferation example for the world. Ford's policy helped prevent several countries, including military dictatorships, from extracting weapons usable plutonium from commercial radioactive waste. Upton's pro-reprocessing advocacy would reverse this 34 year old, bipartisan U.S. policy, risking nuclear weapons proliferation worldwide.

Palisades: Poster Child of Nuclear Security Breaches

- As revealed by such national publications as the *New York Times* and *Esquire* magazine, Palisades has: had armed security guards suffer emotional breakdowns on the job due to overwork; botched responding to three suspicious cars that entered the property on the first anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks, allowing them to disappear; hired as its head of security an unqualified, pathological liar who claimed to have "served" the U.S. government as a one man death squad in the Iraq war; and been cited by the NRC for undisclosed security failures. Upton has done little to nothing to address these grave security breaches at Palisades, certainly one of the top potentially catastrophic terrorist targets in southwest Michigan.

Accidents Waiting to Happen

- Despite Palisades having one of the most brittle reactor pressure vessels in the U.S., Upton strongly advocated for NRC to grant it a 20 year license extension. The pressurized thermal shock during emergency core cooling could

fracture the vessel like a hot glass under cold water, causing a loss of coolant accident, melt down, and catastrophic radiation release. This could kill and injure 18,000 downwind, and cause over \$100 billion in property damage. Palisades is also operating with a severely corroded reactor lid, the very risk that nearly caused a meltdown at an atomic reactor near Toledo in 2002. Palisades also has degraded steam generators, failure of which could also cause a meltdown.

- In Oct., 2005 Palisades nearly dropped a 107 ton, fully loaded high-level radioactive waste cask into its storage pool, risking a radioactive waste inferno that could have caused 25,000 cancer deaths downwind. In Dec., 2007, Palisades admitted radioactivity leaks into groundwater that could be contaminating the drinking water supplies at an adjacent resort community and state park campground. Despite these risks, Upton has remained an enthusiastic cheerleader for continued operations at Palisades.
- Upton has also consistently promoted the Cook nuclear power plant in Bridgman as well, hosting George W. Bush's Energy Secretary for a press conference there in 2007, despite its litany of safety risks. Cook was shut down for major safety violations from 1997 to 2000. The accidental drop of a 35 ton weight may have damaged the reactor in 2006. A soft spot on the already thin containment dome represents a continual risk of catastrophic radioactivity release that could kill and injure 100,000 downwind and cause over \$200 billion in property damage. On June 30, 2008, Upton again appeared at Cook and called for the construction of at least 30 new reactors, trumpeting an initiative by a nuclear industry front group. Upton has also supported the idea of building 100 new reactors, which could only happen if the very severe financial risks are transferred onto the taxpayers.

Handing Over the Keys of the U.S. Treasury to the Nuclear Power Industry

- Upton has led congressional efforts to provide the nuclear power industry with tens or even hundreds of billions of dollars in federal loan guarantees that would leave the U.S. taxpayer holding the bag for new reactor construction loan repayment defaults. But nuclear power has already enjoyed hundreds of billions of dollars in taxpayer subsidies and other public support over the past 50 years. Despite this, Upton helped secure \$20.5 billion for the nuclear industry at the end of 2007, and helped secure an additional \$13 billion for it in the Energy Policy Act of 2005. He now supports President Obama's call for \$54.5 billion in nuclear loan guarantees.
- The industry is seeking tens to hundreds of billions of dollars in loan guarantees, tax incentives, and other subsidies as part of climate, energy, appropriations, and other bills. This, despite the insurmountable risks (including exorbitant costs) that prevent nuclear power from playing any meaningful role in solving the climate crisis. Given his history, Upton can be fully expected to champion these proposals as a senior Republican on the House Energy and Commerce Committee; he is the Ranking Republican on the powerful Energy and Environment Subcommittee, where in June 2009 he unsuccessfully tried to define nuclear power as "renewable," attempting to qualify it for yet more taxpayer support.

Campaign Contributions

- Since 1989, Upton has received \$486,378 from electric utilities. This includes \$93,628 from CMS Energy, a former nuclear utility (which owned and operated multiple reactors from 1962 to 2007, and still bears liability for the high level radioactive wastes it generated) that is his top contributor over the past two decades. He has also received a total of \$861,900 from the energy and natural resources sector. At \$38,800 in the current election cycle alone, Upton the single biggest recipient in all of Congress from EnergySolutions. Based in Salt Lake City, EnergySolutions runs the national dumpsite for Class A so-called "low" level radioactive waste, and is seeking legal authority to import foreign wastes.
- A review of Federal Election Commission records shows that, since 1997, Upton has received \$671,324 in campaign contributions from nuclear power industry related companies' political action committees, and an additional \$79,005 from individuals associated with the nuclear industry. 14 companies, whose associated PAC or employees contributed to Congressman Upton, could directly benefit from the federal nuclear loan guarantees for new reactors that he championed into law.
- In the current election cycle, 7 of Upton's top 20 campaign contributors are nuclear power industry companies or associations.

Conclusion

- Is Upton "the best congressman money can buy," attempting to pay back his corporate campaign contributors in the nuclear power industry by doing their dirty work on Capitol Hill, at the expense of taxpayers -- and at risk to residents -- in southwest Michigan?
- Upton should stop promoting risky and wasteful nuclear power, and redirect federal subsidies to real answers to the climate crisis, including energy efficiency and such renewable sources as wind and solar power.

For more details, as well as a list of references, please see the full "Fred Upton, One of the Nuclear Power Industry's Best Friends in Congress" at www.beyondnuclear.org in the Fact Sheets section, call (301) 270-2209x1, or email kevin@beyondnuclear.org. Prepared by Kevin Kamps, Beyond Nuclear, 6/30/08, updated 10/10/10.