



Beyond Nuclear Fast Facts

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

INTRODUCTION

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 marched in lockstep with the Bush administration's nuclear power expansion plans. Upton has championed 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.

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 earthquake plagued Yucca Mountain, Nevada dumpsite. President Bill Clinton vetoed such bills, once and for all, in April 2000.
- Since then, Upton has been the primary sponsor of the "Fix Yucca" bill, 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 and "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' overflowing high-level radioactive wastes 150 yards from the water of Lake Michigan as "state-of-the-art dry cask technology." But these defective casks cannot be safely unloaded, and have even suffered dangerous explosions.
- 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 their still-fissile nuclear wastes that would make emergency response a suicide mission, resulting in massive, deadly radioactivity releases to the environment.
- 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 has already piled up over the decades, creating de facto indefinite radioactive waste dumps on the shore of Lake Michigan in southwest Michigan.

Risky Relapse into Reprocessing

- Upton has fully embraced the George W. Bush administration's Global Nuclear Energy Partnership, which would revive 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 very well may have prevented several countries from developing nuclear weapons. Upton's pro-reprocessing advocacy would reverse this 32 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; and 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. Upton has done little to nothing to address these grave security breaches at Palisades.

Accidents Waiting to Happen

- Despite Palisades having one of the most brittle reactor pressure vessels in the U.S., Upton strongly advocated for the Nuclear Regulatory Commission 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 melt down at an atomic reactor near Toledo in 2002.
- 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 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. A heavy load drop may have damaged the reactor in 2006. A soft spot on the 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.

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 of billions of dollars in federal loan guarantees that would leave the U.S. taxpayer holding the bag for new reactor construction debt defaults. But nuclear power has already enjoyed \$500 billion in taxpayer subsidies 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.
- Now the industry is seeking hundreds of billions of dollars in loan guarantees and production tax credits as part of climate legislation, despite the insurmountable risks (including exorbitant costs) that prevent nuclear power from playing any role in solving the climate crisis. Upton can be fully expected to champion these proposals as a senior Republican on the House Energy Committee.

Campaign Contributions

- Since 1989, Upton has received \$254,928 from electric utilities. He has also received \$418,528 from the energy and natural resources sector.
- A review of Federal Election Commission records shows that, since 1997, Upton has received \$289,200 in campaign contributions from nuclear power industry related companies. 14 of these would directly benefit from the federal nuclear loan guarantees for new reactors that Upton championed into law.

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 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” fact sheet at www.beyondnuclear.org in the Subsidies section, call (301) 270-2209x1, or email kevin@beyondnuclear.org. *Prepared by Kevin Kamps, Beyond Nuclear, 6/30/2008.*