

Testimony of Daniel B. Poneman
Ohio House of Representatives
Energy and Natural Resources Committee
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Thank you for your work on this important legislation and for giving me the opportunity to speak today.

I grew up in Toledo, not far from the Davis Besse nuclear plant. In fact, I just saw the cooling towers last Saturday while I was driving to Magee Marsh, where I go every Mother's Day weekend to see the incredible variety of warblers, orioles, and tanagers that congregate there in the course of their spring migration. We even saw a couple of screech owls. I now live in Virginia, which shares a state bird with Ohio – the Cardinal -- but Ohio will always be home to me. Indeed, I have the fondest memories of a sixth grade field trip I took to visit this historic building. I never expected I would have the honor to appear before you to address a critical issue facing the citizens of Ohio.

The company I now lead, Centrus Energy, also has deep roots in this state. Many of our employees in Piketon, Ohio, represent the second or third generation of their family to have served in the Nation's uranium enrichment enterprise, going all the way back to the Manhattan Project, and we are all looking forward to the day – which I hope will be very soon – when we can restore America's uranium enrichment capability once again, and do it in Ohio.

Ohio is one of several states that faces a challenge in maintaining its existing fleet of nuclear reactors in a market that doesn't reflect the actual value of the always-on, carbon free, emissions-free electricity that nuclear power plants provide.

The premature shutdown of a nuclear reactor is a permanent, irreversible decision, even though the factors that cause the shutdown may be temporary. Natural gas prices may not always be as low as they are today. There is no federal tax or regulation limiting carbon dioxide emissions, but almost everyone in the energy industry believes that carbon limits or a price on carbon are coming; the question is when, not if. At that point, states that had the foresight to preserve their existing reactors will be vastly better off than those that did not. Because once you've shut the reactors down and begun decommissioning them, there is no going back.

I am optimistic, however, that people across the political spectrum can agree on what to do to avoid a shutdown, even if we don't always agree on why.

If your top priority is good, family-supporting jobs for Ohio workers, saving the reactors is clearly the right choice. The reactors directly and indirectly employ thousands of people in Ohio, but if they shut down, you'll be forced to import more of your electricity from out-of-state.

If you care about protecting ratepayers, it's fair to be concerned about anything that adds a few dollars to electricity bills now. On the other hand, without these reactors, Ohio could well face vastly more expensive costs of complying with limits on carbon emissions in the future.

And if you believe – as I do – that climate change is an existential and urgent threat, then saving these reactors is essential.

I take a back seat to no one in as an advocate of renewable energy. As the longest-serving Deputy Secretary in the history of the U.S. Department of Energy, I was part of a team that made a multi-billion dollar federal investment to jump-start wind and solar power projects across the country. These renewable resources have a critical role to play in building our clean energy future. But we should use them to reduce our carbon emissions, not to displace the carbon-free energy we already have.

Losing the Perry and Davis Besse generating stations would mean saying goodbye to 17 billion kilowatt-hours of carbon-free electricity every year, almost four times as much as the Hoover Dam produces. To replace that with solar, you'd have to put solar panels on every single-family home in Ohio – all 3.5 million of them – and deploy a vast network of batteries to even out the hourly and daily fluctuations of solar energy. And even the most optimistic projections about battery technology do not suggest that we are anywhere near the capability to even out the seasonal fluctuations in intermittent sources of power, which is an even bigger problem.

But imagine you could do that. Ohio would become the global leader in rooftop solar, which would be fantastic. Now imagine that someone came along and tore out those solar panels, 20 years before the end of their useful life. That's equivalent to prematurely and permanently shutting down these reactors. If it sounds like an awful waste of a clean energy resource, that's because it is.

I am proud that my home state is taking a leadership role in designing solutions that will protect consumers as well as the environment – solutions that will mean more jobs and lower electricity bills in the long run.

I began my career as a summer intern to a national hero and one of our greatest Ohioans, John Glenn. Since then, I have been honored to serve in both Republican and Democratic presidential administrations. I believe that supporting the continued operations of Ohio's nuclear plants is a common sense, environmentally responsible, financially prudent idea that can and should unite people no matter their political persuasion. Because whether you care most about clean air, or mitigating the potentially catastrophic effects of climate change, or restoring US global leadership in nuclear energy, or fighting the spread of nuclear weapons, you should want to preserve America's existing fleet of nuclear reactors, and that is what this legislation is designed to do.

Thank you.