



International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War Canada

We are committed to the abolition of nuclear weapons, the prevention of war, the promotion of non-violent means of conflict resolution and social justice in a sustainable world.

An open letter to Environment Minister Steven Guilbeault

the following was published in The Hill Times by the IPPNWC Small Modular Nuclear Reactors Working Group on December 6th, 2021. This open letter was written collectively by Nancy Covington (MD), Charles King (MD), and Cathy Vakil (MD, CCFP, FCFP). Find the article in The Hill online [here](#)

We are three physicians concerned about government support for Small Modular Nuclear Reactors (SMRs), representing International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War Canada and Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment. As physicians, our concerns about health inform our attention to the environment around us, and the particular dangers the world faces today.

We would like to congratulate Environment Minister Steven Guilbeault on his recent appointment as federal minister of environment and climate change. His history of activism for the environment and his long list of achievements in working to build a green economy are impressive. The Canadian public is extremely fortunate to have him in the cabinet at this critical juncture for the future of our planet. We wish him the best in his work with the challenges ahead.

Our hope in writing this letter is that we might be able to work collaboratively in achieving new policies concerning SMRs.

We have deep reservations about Guilbeault's recent statement regarding whether the government will continue subsidizing the nuclear industry: "It's not up to the government to decide which of these technologies will thrive. It's going to be up to the market." However, we would expect great skepticism regarding SMRs as part of Canada's technological approach. Pure market forces cannot support nuclear energy, which has been propped up by governments since its inception. Industry promoting SMRs is well funded and lobbies MPs and Senators continuously. But where is the voice of caution?

There is currently not a single functioning SMR worldwide, despite many failed attempts in the past. The nuclear industry itself estimates that it would take at least ten years to produce a SMR and the nuclear industry is historically notorious for running many years late on production. Hence even if a functioning new SMR were to be created, it would have no place in addressing our climate crisis in a timely fashion.

The nuclear industry has always been financially unviable, eating up billions of dollars in taxpayer subsidies and these projects typically go massively over budget. The global percentage of electricity created by nuclear power has been dwindling for years. The cost per KWH exceeds any other energy source, particularly renewables such as solar and wind power. This is money which could be redirected in other ways to address our climate crisis - for instance by improving



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existing renewable energy systems or by assisting in a just transition for workers in the fossil fuel industry.

The dangers inherent in nuclear accidents are so horrific (Chernobyl, Fukushima for example) that no liability insurance is available for this industry - the government dealing with the disaster (i.e., the taxpayer) becoming the de facto underwriter. Nuclear energy produces extremely hazardous radioactive waste for which there is no acceptable disposal method. These human made substances produce ionizing radiation that threatens human health, our water sources, and the environment, for hundreds of thousands of years. Cancer, cardiovascular disease as well as genetic anomalies are some of the better known health effects which create unspeakable burdens to future generations.

SMRs use technologies which extract plutonium from CANDU waste, a process which causes security and nuclear weapons proliferation risks. Although the nuclear industry states that this plutonium would not be sufficiently refined to be fashioned into a nuclear bomb, many international experts disagree.

The climate crisis is upon us. Canadians deserve a future of renewable energy and environmental stewardship, neither of which is possible if Canada continues to promote SMRs. Policies driven by market, and corporate interests driven by profit, do not hold the health of the planet as the first priority. We advocate that our government take charge of a bold plan to address climate change, recognizing the emergency that it is. SMRs cannot be a part of this plan.

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