

LETTERS

# Nuclear ambitions in the push for renewable energy

Updated January 17, 2024, 2:30 a.m.



Test engineer Jacob Wilcox pulled his arm out of a glove box used for processing sodium at TerraPower in Everett, Wash. The company, of which Bill Gates is founder and chairman, is developing and building small nuclear reactors. ELAINE THOMPSON/ASSOCIATED PRESS

## High costs, delays, and safety concerns make small reactors a hard sell

In their Jan. 9 op-ed, [“The world wants to triple nuclear energy: What will it take?”](#) Ernest J. Moniz and Armond Cohen write, rather presumptuously, as if the global desire for more nuclear power is a foregone conclusion. But the 24 countries that joined a declaration at the COP28 climate summit to triple global nuclear power installation by 2050 are hardly reflective of “the world.” Meanwhile, the authors fail to mention the

declaration also made at COP28 by almost 120 countries to triple global renewable energy by 2030, 20 years sooner than the nuclear plan.

The immense costs and uncertain timelines of nuclear power are unlikely to have investors beating down the door, especially in light of the collapse in the United States of the NuScale six-unit small modular reactor, or SMR, project late last year when estimated costs rose more than 50 percent and customers fled, prompting its own CEO to declare it a “[dead horse](#).”

The NuScale plan, [subsidized by the US Department of Energy](#), would have seen power purchases across [seven states](#) for electricity from a reactor considered the front-runner in the SMR campaign Moniz and Cohen so heartily endorse (as long as taxpayers and international financial institutions help shoulder the costs). Instead, disillusioned investors are suing the company.

Beating the nuclear dead horse has been going on for decades. Yet it remains by far the slowest and most expensive way to generate electricity, wasting precious time and money. This makes nuclear power entirely unsuitable for addressing a climate crisis that is upon us now.

Nuclear power also is inherently dangerous. Changing the regulatory framework is a smokescreen for weakening safety margins to speed up production and reduce costs. What the world wants and needs is fast, affordable, and safer renewable energy, not another Chernobyl.

Linda Pentz Gunter  
International specialist  
Beyond Nuclear  
Takoma Park, Md.