

A NUCLEAR NEWS INTERVIEW

John Sununu: Let's actively support nuclear power

Gov. John H. Sununu is an advocate of nuclear energy, he says, because it's good for the world. Because it is a safe, reliable, and environmentally friendly source of electric power, he has been vocal with his support before audiences that have included American Nuclear Society members.

Sununu, of Salem, N.H., is president of JHS Associates, Ltd. and a former partner in Trinity International Partners, a private financial firm.

Sununu was commissioned chief of staff to the President of the United States on January 21, 1989, and served under President George H. W. Bush in the White House until March 1, 1992.

As chief of staff, Sununu oversaw the daily operations of the White House and its staff. He also served as counsellor to the President. Sununu is a member of the Board of Trustees for the George Bush Presidential Library Foundation.

Sununu became New Hampshire's 75th chief executive on January 6, 1983, and served three consecutive terms prior to joining the White House staff. He assumed office with a background of nearly 20 years of experience as an educator, engineer, small businessman, and community leader. He gained regional and national recognition through his chairmanship of the Coalition of Northeastern Governors, the chairmanship of the Republican Governors' Association, and his election in 1987 to the chair-

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Sununu: Nuclear is best for generating safe, environmentally sound, reliable electricity

manship of the National Governors' Association.

From 1963 until his election as governor, he served as president of JHS Engineering Company and Thermal Research Inc. In addition, he helped establish and served as chief engineer of Astro Dynamics Inc. from 1960 until 1965. He was a visiting professor at Harvard University, John F. Kennedy School of Government, for the fall 2003 semester. Sununu, from 1992 until 1998, cohosted CNN's nightly *Crossfire* program, a news/public affairs discussion program.

Sununu attended the Massachusetts Institute of Technology at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, and earned his Ph.D. there in 1966 in Mechanical Engineering. From 1968 until 1973, he was associate dean of the College of Engineering at Tufts University and associate professor of mechanical engineering. Sununu served on the advisory board of the Technology and Policy Program at MIT from 1984 until 1989. He is a member of the National Academy of Engineering.

Sununu talked with Rick Michal, *NN* senior associate editor, about the need for nuclear professionals to get the word out to policymakers about the benefits of the technology.



Why do you support nuclear power?

The secret to the quality of life for people and for economic vitality for our country is a sound, efficient, reliable source of energy, particularly electric energy. Nuclear power is the best way I know for generating safe, environmentally sound, and reli-

We should first focus on the need for an energy policy that meets the national needs and a policy that recognizes that today nuclear power is, in fact, the cornerstone of baseload power generation in this country. We need to focus on nuclear's potential contributions in the future, that it can and

should be expanded.

We can make reference to the fact that President Bush has included an aggressive nuclear policy agenda in his energy policy and that the administration supports nuclear.

We should then bring the issues back home locally. Obvi-

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able electrical energy. It’s good for the country, good for the people, and, frankly, it’s good for the world.

How important is it that nuclear professionals engage with their congressional representatives to paint nuclear as positive?

I think it’s important for anyone in any profession to realize that they have to be an active part of the policymaking that is related to their profession. If they sit back and don’t participate, then it’s only the people who generally oppose whatever the goals of that profession are that end up being heard.

The professionals of the nuclear industry, in my opinion, have historically been unusually quiet in their participation in the policymaking process. It’s partly because they have been on the defensive and have let the opposition to nuclear power take the lead and set the agenda. Therefore, I really do believe in an active involvement by the professionals in what is part of the American system, participation in the policymaking process by communicating with those who have to make policy.

It is also important for the professionals to understand that the best way to do that is to participate as constituents of the policymakers—not just walk the halls of Congress in general, but to focus on their particular representative and their particular senators. They need to develop a personal relationship and dialogue with them. That participation will then be seen as an important piece of the specific responsibility of that representative.

What issues should be brought forth?

ously, every professional generally lives and works in a specific district and they should talk about the contributions that their personal work does to give integrity and stability to the energy generating facilities of the area they live in, the region that they are a part of.

We should talk with pride about what the industry has achieved in terms of professional development, performance, and quality of services over the past few decades. We should remind the representatives of how critical the nuclear generating facility is to their particular area. We need to let them know that the professionals of our industry are citizens who do real work every single day, who have families, who have a profession that is critical, who are individuals of character and integrity, and that they wouldn’t be participating in anything that is not important and constructive for the country.

Do the representatives really want to see nuclear professionals?

I put it again in the context of what I just said. They want to see constituents. We should be showing up as constituents who happen to be nuclear professionals associated with a particular industry. There is no representative who does not want to see his constituents. That is why I say that personalizing it and localizing it is the important aspect of doing an effective job in communicating. A lot of old politicians have said it in very simple terms: “All politics is local.” Make this a local relationship.

What result should be expected from meeting with the representatives?

Good lobbying is like a pebble in the shoe. It doesn't happen with just one visit. You develop a relationship, a contact. You become not only a constituent, but as a professional, a resource. The result that is hoped for and to be expected is to be part of the energy policy dialogue of the representative over time. The goal is to establish a bidirectional communication link with those representatives. You are not only talking to them, but when they have questions, they will see the professionals as a resource to call on for advice.

Aren't most representatives uncomfortable with nuclear issues?

There is a lot of discomfort with the issue in Washington, primarily because we haven't done our job in the past. We have to start bringing them back to the comfort zone. Again, I think the tremendously successful record and contribution of the nuclear industry over the last decade or two in this country is the cornerstone on which to stand and argue to bring back that level of confidence and comfort.

You have said that antinuclear advocates have done the nuclear industry a favor by putting it out of business for 15 years. Would you explain that statement?

I think that we have had 15 years of almost no rancorous debate on the nuclear issue, which means that there is a whole new generation out there to be educated on this issue. The question is whether the nuclear industry, through our nuclear professionals, is smart enough and committed enough to take advantage of this opportunity to educate what I believe is a very receptive population at this time.

I think this is probably the most critical

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time in the industry's history in the sense that it has a chance now to deal constructively with the reality that a nuclear component in our energy policy is a huge national advantage. It is a responsibility that I hope nuclear professionals accept, respond to, and begin to be active participants in this policy education and policy development process.

How does a nuclear professional make an antinuke feel uncomfortable for being a Luddite?

There have been a series of episodes around the country in which the national dependence on electric energy has been made clear—blackouts, problems in California of lack of supply, etc. Just building on what I believe is now a developing public awareness of the fact that electricity is not a luxury but a necessity should be the focal point of the argument. The antis seem to be not only antinuclear, but also anticoal, and in fact anti any fossil fuel, because they focus on environmental impacts. And now all of sudden, from my reading of the papers and watching television, I begin to see that they are even antiwind in Massachusetts. Just remind the world that the Luddites are anti-everything. We need something, and that something is best built on the stability, the safety, and the unbelievably good performance of nuclear.

Are house members better targets for contact than senators?

House members have a smaller local region to represent. Since politics is local, there are easier mechanisms for establishing the personal relationships that are critical in dealing with this issue with house members. But that doesn't mean that senators should not be part of the activities of the professionals in trying to communicate on this. You've got to work with them both. You will probably find that it will be

easier to develop a personal relationship with the representative, but they are both important parts of the process.

Is it worth going to talk to openly antinuclear congresspeople?

Sure. They should be made uncomfortable that there is a significant part of

their constituency that is pronuclear, that understands the technology, recognizes the safety, and frankly knows the irrationality of not only the antinuclear position of the antinuclear lobbies, but is there to help that antinuclear member of Congress understand the difference between fact and fiction.

You have used the term “positive psychology” as it relates to policymaking. What is that?

I think there is an opportunity now, be-

cause there is a receptivity in the public, to focus on the positive rather than just being in the defensive posture as the industry was in for such a long time a decade or two ago. We should emphasize the benefits and the positive results of the progress that the United States and the world have made in

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improving the professionalism and safety associated with the generation of nuclear power. Just emphasize all these good results, good things, and great developments of the past decade or so. Build on that positive record.

You have said that if funds were available and if utilities banded together, they could run an effective advertising campaign, perhaps launched in USA Today. Could you talk about that? (Incidentally, the Nuclear Energy Institute has been running a mass media advertising campaign in national publications—Ed.)

I gave that as an example as fact that an important part of what we are talking about is basic education of the public and, frankly, controlling the dialogue and the language that is used. The best way to do that is to begin to put the real, positive and constructive statistics and performance realities, and all the positive things that we understand are true about nuclear power in front of the public. The best way to do that is through paid advertising.

I think the best paid advertising today is to get in those newspapers that have national circulation like *USA Today* and *The Wall Street Journal*. Start doing it on a regular basis so people look for it and begin to read it. There was a major oil company that did it a few years ago with quarter-page ads I believe in *The New York Times*. Over a period of three or four years, they got a very positive message out. I think we should be looking at this as a multiyear effort and recognize that the time to invest in communication is not just when there is a crisis. It is in fact received best when there is not a crisis.

I want to emphasize that timing is important. The best time to do something is when there is no incentive for the opposition to be aggressive. Since we are in a period of relative calm, this is truly the best time for professionals to get involved. ■