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Energy leaders push nuclear plants at National Summit

Kim Kozlowski / The Detroit news

Detroit -- Nuclear energy is one of the most effective ways to reach growing energy needs, reduce carbon dioxide emissions and create jobs, three energy leaders said today during a three-day summit to address the economic future of the nation.

"A nuclear renaissance is under way," DTE Energy Chairman and CEO Anthony F. Earley Jr. told a group of energy leaders during the National Summit. "Nuclear energy has to play a crucial role in meeting our country's growing energy needs while reducing carbon emissions."

With the nation's aging power facilities -- most average 30 years old and retirement expected between 40-60 years -- now is the time to reshape the energy mix of power facilities to include more nuclear plants, the energy leaders said.

"Every study that has been done says you can't come anywhere near where what you want to be in reducing greenhouse gas emissions without a large nuclear growth not only in the U.S., but worldwide," said Martin Fertel, president and CEO of the Nuclear Energy Institute.

About 70 percent of U.S. power is supplied by coal and gas, which emit greenhouse gas emissions that are linked to climate change. Of the sources that do not emit greenhouse gas emissions during operation, nuclear makes up the largest energy source.

There are 104 nuclear plants in the United States and 17 applications for new plants before the federal regulatory commissions, Fertel said. If the plans in the pipeline are approved, Fertel said, 100,000 jobs would be created in construction and operation.

As the U.S. works to meet growing demands for energy in the future with cleaner sources, leaders say it should take a cue from France and Japan and rely more on nuclear power, a resource that is renewable, non-emitting, safe and abundant.

"You are never going to run an auto assembly plant or a steel mill off of wind turbine or solar power," Earley said. "They are just not reliable. The sun doesn't always shine, the wind doesn't always blow. You need big, reliable coal or nuclear plants as the backbone. You can supplement it with wind and solar power, but it can't be your main source."

Opponents say the issue of nuclear power waste disposal is unresolved. In Michigan, nuclear waste sits on the shores of the Great Lakes, said Anne Woiwode, director of the Sierra Club's Michigan chapter.

Additionally, it is an extremely expensive investment that will not leave room for investment in

smarter, renewable energy sources and the cost will fall primarily to residents.

"Nuclear power does not makes sense," Woiwode said by phone from Lansing. "We have to make sure we have a smart mix of our energy sources in the future."

kkozlowski@detnews.com (313) 222-2024

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