

# The Need for Nuclear

CHRISTINE TODD WHITMAN ASSUMES SPOKESWOMAN ROLE

BY MARTIN ROSENBERG



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smiling politico Christine Todd Whitman, the former secretary of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, somewhat incongruously next to a snapshot of activist Patrick Moore, co-founder of the Greenpeace environmental group. Now, the unlikely pair co-chairs the coalition, supported by the Nuclear Energy Institute, and advocate for nuclear power. Call it an example of how an increasingly complicated energy world is forging novel alliances.

Whitman, the former governor of New Jersey, recently talked with *EnergyBiz*, and her edited comments follow.

**ENERGYBIZ** What is the main obstacle today to development of nuclear power plants?

**WHITMAN** The biggest concern raised is what are we going to do with the spent fuel rods, given the Senate's inability to move forward on Yucca Mountain as the designated repository for the nation.

**ENERGYBIZ** What is the answer to that?

**WHITMAN** It's going to be tough. We've got to get a vigorous discussion going.

**ENERGYBIZ** How do we solve the waste issue?

**WHITMAN** We have to show a much greater commitment than we have to recycling. Spent nuclear fuel rods still have 96 percent of their fissionable material, which is usable power. The French through recycling get it down to about 2 to 3 percent. We just haven't been at the cutting edge of this now since the 1970s when we turned our back on nuclear.

**ENERGYBIZ** Mayor Rudy Giuliani talks about the need for nuclear power. How about the other candidates?

**WHITMAN** Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton are both supportive. John Edwards is absolutely against it. But Rudy Giuliani, John McCain and Mitt Romney have all been supportive of nuclear.

**ENERGYBIZ** The federal government is gearing up for a wave of new nuclear license applications. Is the momentum unstoppable?

**WHITMAN** I don't think it's unstoppable, no. Right now if you ask people in general about nuclear, you get around 58 percent who say nuclear ought to be part of our future. When you educate them a little bit, that goes up dramatically to 70 percent or so. When it comes to the actual siting, it depends on where they are locating it. If it's a new site, you're probably going to get a lot more pushback.

**ENERGYBIZ** How many nuclear plants are needed?

**WHITMAN** If what the Department of Energy says is right about a 40 percent increase in demand by 2030 for electricity, you have to build anywhere between 30 and 50 new nuclear facilities. That is if they will continue to provide 20 percent of electricity.



Christine Todd Whitman  
PHOTO COURTESY OF CASENERGY COALITION

**ENERGYBIZ** And what about replacing retiring facilities?

**WHITMAN** That's got to go on, too. But we've been out of the business for so long, there are only a few places in the world that manufacture some of the key parts. Everybody that's going nuclear now is in the line to get those parts.

**ENERGYBIZ** Are the workers out there to build new nuclear projects?

**WHITMAN** Well, the unions will tell you they've got them. The Navy will say they've got well-trained nuclear engineers who have been on our nuclear subs for

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years. There's been an up-tick recently in students majoring in nuclear engineering. The jobs are well paid, and a lot of young people are now starting to look at it as a career.

**ENERGYBIZ** Is there enough uranium to fuel an expanding nuclear fleet?

**WHITMAN** Yes, there's plenty of uranium. It's in this country. We don't have to import it. We'll be fine for a couple hundred years with what we've got here.

**ENERGYBIZ** Since you left the EPA four years ago, how has the nation's attitude toward environmental questions evolved?

**WHITMAN** We're finally getting to be a little more sensitive to it. The frustrating thing has always been that if you give Americans an open-ended question to list their top ten most important issues, they never list the environment. It's not because they don't care. They felt in the past there's nothing they could do about it. But the discussions that have been going on recently on climate change have really awakened the American people.

**ENERGYBIZ** Was climate change and global warming on your radar screen when you were at the EPA?

**WHITMAN** Yes it was. It just didn't get very far.

**THE AMERICAN PEOPLE WILL SUPPORT NUCLEAR IF THEY FEEL THEY ARE GETTING THE STRAIGHT STORY.**

**ENERGYBIZ** Why?

**WHITMAN** Well, there were some and there still are some basic skeptics in the administration. They also wanted to be very sure of the science. The science around climate change is relatively young. Now we know that the bulk of the science clearly says that the climate is changing and that human activity plays a role. There are real consequences to that.

**ENERGYBIZ** When you talk to electric utility executives, what are the main messages that you tell them about nuclear power?

**WHITMAN** I say look, you've got to be prepared to answer the questions and you've got to answer them openly. The American people will support nuclear if they feel they are getting the straight story.

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