

Donalds: Why I'm an Advocate for Advanced Nuclear Technology



OPINION

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By Congressman Byron Donalds (FL-19)

People always ask me why I'm an advocate for nuclear energy and where my interest in nuclear originally came from. Truth be known, I'm a former community banker and financial services professional, husband, and father of three boys, and I grew up poor in Brooklyn, New York—with zero prior nuclear experience at all.

Although I've learned much about nuclear energy policy over the course of approximately three years of being a member of Congress, one may still ask: what sparked my interest in becoming one of the leading pro-nuclear voices in the U.S. Congress?

Growing up, I used to brainstorm and talk politics with a role model of mine, who happened to be a commander of a nuclear submarine. He explained to me the benefits that a nuclear-powered submarine can provide and ultimately taught me that the Nuclear Navy has been a great example for the American commercial nuclear industry overall.

Additionally, my interest in nuclear [energy](#) stems from the impacts of bad economic policy and the resulting trickledown effects that bad policy can have on the price of energy and the economy as a whole. The fact of the matter is this: if we don't have cheap, affordable, readily-available power—we won't have a functional economy, but instead we'll have chaos. In other

words, you cannot build a successful economy without an ample supply of reliable energy—full stop.

My nuclear interest is also fueled by my concerns with the dishonest environmental, social, and corporate governance (ESG) policy “push.” In my view, ESG isn’t meant to actually solve real-world problems. To be frank, ESG is a corporate virtue-signaling incentive structure based on flawed information and skewed data. Unfortunately, scam ESG policy has also played into the misconceptions associated with nuclear—even though if you dig deeper, nuclear energy is the most beneficial source of energy from an objective perspective.

To be clear, nuclear is the cleanest, “greenest,” and most reliable source of [energy](#)—regardless of its historical unsubstantiated negative connotation. But there is one unintentional outcome to the artificial ESG push: momentum is growing for advanced nuclear [technology](#) as we prepare for the next Nuclear Renaissance.

Importantly, I believe that the time is now to enact meaningful public policy change to enhance the utilization of nuclear energy—both conventional and advanced. In particular, as the Vice Chair of the bipartisan Advanced Nuclear Caucus, I have personally been focused on addressing the challenges associated with developing and deploying advanced nuclear technology. In fact, look no further than the fifteen-and-counting nuclear energy-related bills that I’ve introduced thus far in the 118th Congress.

To the American people, I want to stress that it’s not “if” advanced nuclear technology can be deployed, it’s “when” advanced nuclear technology will be deployed. When I think of “innovation,” advanced nuclear technology comes to mind. I also believe that innovation is what breeds successful economies, and innovative advanced nuclear technologies should be embraced to get the U.S. economy back on track.



Rep. Byron Donalds

Here are a few main reasons why I'm an advocate for advanced nuclear technology: (1) global advanced nuclear leadership is up for grabs, and the

United States is falling behind our adversaries; (2) we must have reliable and resilient baseload power sources to avoid future blackouts and brownouts—and nuclear [energy](#)'s 92.6% capacity factor speaks for itself; (3) innovative advanced nuclear technology is no longer our grandparents' nuclear technology; and (4) the bipartisan interest in advanced nuclear represents a great opportunity to enact solutions-oriented public policy change. Not to mention the potential complementary uses of advanced nuclear reactors, including for: natural disaster response, zero-emissions hydrogen production, desalination, industrial heating, space exploration, etc.

However, I also recognize and understand that there are major challenges that lie ahead for advanced reactor deployment. Such challenges include: (1) unduly burdensome and antiquated regulatory barriers associated with licensing advanced nuclear technology; (2) market risks associated with investing in first-of-a-kind (FOAK) technology; (3) changing nuclear's negative connotation overall and providing factual information relating to the inherent benefits of advanced nuclear; (4) leveling the playing field between advanced nuclear technology and other less-reliable sources of energy (e.g. wind and solar); and (5) establishing a domestic supply of high assay low enriched uranium (HALEU) to fuel our nation's advanced nuclear reactors—especially because the U.S. currently depends on Russia for its HALEU supply, but this is no longer an option.

As a financial services professional with a unique take on our country's nuclear energy-related needs, I see much room for improvement and positive change. Notably, I believe we should be developing and deploying advanced nuclear technology as fast as possible in the United States—while properly accounting for safety, nonproliferation, and environmental risks. America used to be THE global nuclear leader, but our country no longer can claim this prestigious title—which ultimately presents a short-term and long-term national security risk for our great nation.

Although I'm a fiscal conservative, it's my view that the U.S. Government should step up to the plate and enact meaningful public policy change to

foster American energy independence and American advanced nuclear leadership moving forward. For example, countries like China and Russia are establishing 100+ year financing relationships with countries around the world to construct and deploy advanced nuclear technology. In comparison, the United States has taken a back seat to our adversaries and has fallen behind the race for dominance in the international advanced nuclear energy marketplace.

In my opinion, the Legislative Branch and the Executive Branch should work hand-in-hand to collaborate on modernizing the antiquated regulatory process associated with deploying advanced nuclear technology. Additionally, Congress and industry stakeholders must also address the market risks associated with FOAK technology—and having the support of the federal government will naturally alleviate market risks associated with deploying advanced nuclear technology. Therefore, I believe Congress can play a vital role in planning for the mass deployment of advanced nuclear technology, and for once I believe there is great opportunity for Congress to legislate proactively (c.f. reactively).

I also believe that Congress can assist with striking unnecessary red tape and reducing exorbitant licensing fees to ensure the timely domestic deployment of advanced nuclear technology. Finally, I believe that Congress can assist with realistically looking at the value an energy source can provide to the electric grid and environment overall, and thus level the playing between advanced nuclear and other intermittent sources of energy.

Moreover, we must turn paper reactors into actual [energy](#) generating technologies as fast as possible. Taking advantage of the achievable opportunity to deploy advanced nuclear technology domestically should be a top priority for congress—I know it is for my office.

While the Nuclear Navy and ESG policy initially sparked my interest in nuclear energy, I've come to discover that advanced nuclear technology is a likely solution to America's future [energy](#) challenges. Simply put,

utilizing advanced nuclear technology will assist with bolstering America's national security and energy independence down the road, but it's also a rare bipartisan opportunity to work with more climate-focused members of congress on commonsense nuclear-related legislative initiatives.

All in all, the time is ripe for Congress to get to work and pass impactful nuclear energy policy—there's much to do. Moving forward, I'll continue to be a leading pro-nuclear voice in Congress and a strong advocate for the broad deployment of advanced nuclear technology.

Rep. Bryon Donalds was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 2020 and sits on the House Oversight Committee, Budget Committee, Small Business Committee, and Economic Prosperity and Fairness Committee.