

Bill Gates considers W.Va. to expand nuclear energy efforts

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Bill Gates speaks during the Global Fund's Seventh Replenishment Conference, Wednesday, Sept. 21, 2022, in New York. Gates topped The Chronicle of Philanthropy's annual list of the 10 largest charitable gifts announced by individuals or their foundations in 2022. This year's list totaled nearly \$9.3 billion. Gates gave \$5 billion to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to back the grantmaker's work in global health, development, policy and advocacy, and U.S. education. Credit: AP Photo/Evan Vucci, File

Bill Gates is looking to West Virginia as he plans for the next phase of his effort to reboot U.S. nuclear energy technology: powering the east coast.

Microsoft co-founder Gates, who visited a closed down coal-fired plant in Glasgow, West Virginia on Monday, said he needs to see how his Sodium [nuclear reactor](#) demonstration in Wyoming performs before making any announcements about new sites. The Kemmerer, Wyoming sodium-cooled nuclear reactor is taking over the site of a current coal-powered plant and was scheduled to be online by 2028, but is facing delays because its only source of fuel was uranium from Russia, now at war with Ukraine.

However, during a visit to the American Electric Power plant, which closed in 2015, Gates called the West Virginia's Legislature's decision last year to repeal the state's ban on nuclear [power](#) facilities "quite impressive" and said he's looking for sites to expand his efforts to the east coast.

West Virginia's new law has opened the door to discussions with American Electric Power during the last six months, said Gates, who founded TerraPower, the company behind the \$4 billion project in Wyoming.

"Really, I think six months ago we really weren't on their radar much at all, nuclear wasn't, but the Legislature did say, 'Okay, we're open-minded to nuclear' and that was quite impressive," he said of the American Electric Power plant, known as AEP.

The Wyoming coal-fired power plant that is being converted for the sodium-cooled nuclear reactor is scheduled to close in 2025, when Gates said its 200 employees will stay on and transition to working with [nuclear energy](#). The [demonstration project](#) comes as many U.S. states

see nuclear emerging as an option to help transition energy production away from coal, oil and [natural gas](#) to reduce [greenhouse gas emissions](#).

The Wyoming plant will feature a sodium reactor and molten salt energy storage system that will perform better, more safely and cost less than a traditional nuclear power, Gates said.

TerraPower CEO Chris Levesque said sites like the Glasgow plant are "ready and capable" to support a plant like Natrium because the company can take advantage of existing infrastructure, like the grid connection.

"You can get a two-year jump on this one—this is ready to go now," Democratic Sen. Manchin joked, as he accompanied Gates on a tour of the plant in Glasgow.

The coal-fired plant, known as the Kanawha River Plant, is located along the Kanawha River in Glasgow, about 20 miles (32 kilometers) southeast from Charleston. It went into operation in 1953 and was retired in May 2015 as part of AEP's plan to comply with the U.S. EPA's Mercury and Air Toxics Standards.

Gates said that as the Wyoming project matures, it will be more clear how efforts can be expanded to new sites and will give utility companies the time needed to look at their overall strategy and see how and if nuclear power fits in.

"We hope to say, three years from now, have a couple of utilities that have a pretty solid plan and that Natrium is a part of their multi-decade generation strategy," he said.

An Associated Press survey last year of the energy policies in all 50 states and the District of Columbia found that a strong majority— about

two-thirds— say nuclear, in one fashion or another, will help take the place of fossil fuels. The momentum building behind [nuclear power](#) could lead to the first expansion of nuclear reactor construction in the U.S. in more than three decades.

Kanawha Valley Regional Transportation Authority bus driver Anthony Smith's grandparents lived in Glasgow, and both his parents worked at the plant before it closed. He said the town of less than 1,000 is in need of a boost.

"This town needs rejuvenating, honestly. It was different back then, you know?" he said. "I'd love to see things back how they used to be, that's probably what a lot of people feel anywhere they're from that has an area that's struggling, they just want to see it get better."

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