

An energy bill boosting nuclear power heading to Biden's desk

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Democrats and Republicans don't agree on much on Capitol Hill these days, but they just passed bipartisan legislation to promote the growth of future nuclear power plants—and President Joe Biden is expected to sign

it into law.

What's called the ADVANCE (Accelerating Deployment of Versatile, Advanced Nuclear for Clean Energy) Act aims to make it easier and faster to build new reactors across the country. The bill sailed through the Senate earlier this week on an 88-2 vote.

Earlier this year, the House of Representatives passed a similar version of the bill that was sponsored by Rep. Scott Peters, D-San Diego.

"Nuclear energy is essential to a clean, resilient and reliable electric grid and represents the largest source of zero-carbon electricity in the United States," Peters said in a statement.

The legislation looks to encourage developers to build new power plants by reducing fees and accelerating the permitting process. It also looks to spur investments in improved designs, such as small modular reactors seen at the TerraPower project in Wyoming.

Backed by billionaire Bill Gates, the site broke ground earlier this month and plans to start producing electricity in 2030.

Despite a polarized political environment, the ADVANCE Act worked its way through Congress with support from Democrats attracted to the fact that nuclear plants do not emit [greenhouse gases](#) and Republicans who view nuclear as a reliable provider of baseload power.

"Republicans and Democrats recognize the development of new nuclear technologies is critical to America's energy security and our environment," Sen. Shelley Moore Capito, R-W.Va., said on the Senate floor Tuesday night.

But critics of nuclear power said the ADVANCE Act protects the

financial health of the industry and its investors more than the public.

"Make no mistake," said Edwin Lyman, director of nuclear power safety at the Union of Concerned Scientists, "this is not about making the reactor licensing process more efficient, but about weakening safety and security oversight across the board, a long-standing industry goal."

As for persistent concerns about spent fuel, or waste, at [nuclear power plants](#), Peters in his statement said, "I will continue to push for a permanent and responsible solution to this problem."

The nuclear power bill was folded into a Senate vote that approved the Fire Grants and Safety Act. The bill also included legislation to streamline developments in [nuclear fusion](#) by codifying the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission's authority to regulate commercial fusion power plants that scientists and researchers hope will be built someday.

"Fusion energy holds the potential to power the entire country with a sustainable supply of nearly unlimited, reliable and carbon-free electricity," Sen. Alex Padilla, D-Los Angeles, said in a statement. Padilla was one of four senators from both parties who introduced the Fusion Energy Act.

Nuclear fusion differs from [nuclear fission](#), which is the process used in facilities such as the now-shuttered San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station. While fission splits the nuclei of atoms to create power, [fusion](#) causes hydrogen nuclei to collide and fuse into helium atoms that release incredible amounts of energy—essentially replicating the power of the sun.

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