

# OP-ED

## I'm for Nuclear and I am an Environmentalist



Janet Lee-Sheriff, President & Director of the Clean Energy Association of New Mexico (CLEAN) and Chief Executive Officer & Director of Verdera Energy Corp.

Is this possible? Pro-nuclear and pro-environmentalist at the same time? It might be like saying, can you be a Cowboys fan and live in Houston? Of course, the two are not mutually exclusive.

For decades, environmentalism and nuclear energy have been cast as enemies. But what if that narrative is outdated? Meet the next age nuclear—the big shift.

This shift isn't just theoretical or fringe; it's mainstream, even among well-known climate champions. Bill Gates, long known for his focus on climate, has become one of the most prominent advocates for next-generation nuclear energy. Through his company TerraPower, Gates is investing

billions in advanced reactor designs aimed at delivering reliable, carbon-free electricity while dramatically improving safety and reducing waste. Gates has been clear: if the goal is decarbonization, nuclear must be part of the solution. When one of the world's most influential climate investors embraces nuclear, it signals that environmentalism and nuclear energy are no longer opposing camps—they are converging. In a February 2021 interview on CNBC's Squawk Box with Andrew Ross Sorkin, discussing public perceptions of nuclear power safety compared with fossil fuels like coal, oil, and natural gas, Gates said, "Nuclear has actually been safer

than any other source of power generation."

So why nuclear? It is the largest source of carbon-free electricity in the United States and protects our air quality by generating electricity without harmful pollutants such as nitrogen oxides, sulfur dioxide, particulate matter, or mercury. Nuclear energy already displaces 1.6 gigatonnes of carbon dioxide emissions annually and will play a major role in decarbonization strategies.

Nuclear energy is also extremely energy dense. One uranium pellet—about the size of a gummy bear—creates as much energy as one ton of coal, 149 gallons of oil, or 17,000 cubic feet of natural gas. You would need more

than 3 million solar panels to produce the same amount of power as a typical commercial reactor, or more than 430 wind turbines.

Modern nuclear is not the risky, waste-heavy industry of the past. In fact, nuclear energy is one of the most heavily regulated industries in the world. Modern technology, strict federal oversight, and decades of operational experience ensure strong safety measures are in place.

How do we bridge the understanding gap between nuclear energy and environmentalism? Only through accurate, clear information and constant communication for good decision making. That is why the Clean Energy Association of New Mexico's in-

augural Nuclear in New Mexico: Fueling the U.S. Nuclear Renaissance conference, April 20–22 on Santa Ana Pueblo, is both timely and vital. The goal is to make the complex science, regulation, and realities of a highly advanced and safe industry accessible to everyone. Conference discussions will include a panel on collaboration around nuclear activities in New Mexico and across the United States, focused on how we work together; updates on what's new in nuclear development in New Mexico; and an overview of the nuclear fuel cycle in the state; and an in-depth look at the critical minerals' potential of uranium deposits in New Mexico. Together, these con-

versations offer a clear, grounded look at how nuclear energy and uranium resources can support a clean, reliable, and affordable energy future. Registration is now open at [nuclearinnewmexico.com](https://nuclearinnewmexico.com).

<https://nuclearinnewmexico.com/#book>

Being an environmentalist doesn't mean rejecting nuclear—it means embracing every tool that can save our planet.

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