

Don't Nuke the Climate: Street Theater

Narrator: The story of the nuclear industry is a cautionary tale. One that relies heavily on lessons from the past, reflection on the present and the rare gift of reading the trajectory of both to foresee the future of nuclear power. [actors can hold up signs that underscore past, present and future such as Chernobyl, Largest Managerial Disaster in History, Cost Overruns /Delays, No Solution to Waste, etc.] Proceed with care. The tale of nuclear power is not for the weak of heart or weak of pocketbook. But be encouraged that those that are given the gift of glimpsing a grim future are like Ebenezer Scrooge, himself, emboldened to immediately stop in their tracks and change course....

[Sign for Act I: The Ghost of Nukes Past]

Narrator: The holiday season never meant much to Mr. Burns, but holiday or no holiday there was much work to be done. Other people's money to be spent, in a great big hurry, while the American taxpayer was distracted, not paying attention, distracted by such things as, oh, the holiday season, the perfect time for financial shenanigans and pre-emptive mega billion dollar bailouts.

Mr. Burns: Nuclear reactors aren't going to finance themselves. Bah Humbug.

Narrator: It has been nearly 40 years since a new reactor has been commissioned, the industry's manufacturing infrastructure is washed up, its work force is rapidly retiring, construction cost are prohibitively expensive and constantly climbing, the waste repository the industry has been banking on for the past two decades is all but canceled and the original financial package intended to shepherd the technology back into existence is no longer adequate. In short, the nuclear industry is on the brink of becoming extinct. Only one thing can resuscitate it...

Mr. Burns: We need massive government subsidies. The Department of Energy is on the verge of handing out \$18.5 billion in taxpayer backed loan guarantees, but we need more. [Enter Ghost of Nukes Past]

Ghost of Nukes Past: More?

Mr. Burns: Who are you?

Ghost: I'm the ghost of too cheap to meter.

Mr. Burns: But you don't exist.

Ghost: Exactly. I never came to pass. Do you remember why, Mr. Burns?

Mr. Burns: I ...

Ghost: Construction costs for the first wave of nuclear development skyrocketed, while growth in demand for electricity slowed. Electric utilities ended up abandoning over 100 plants before or during construction, or half of all those ordered. Those that utilities did complete led to large increases in electricity rates. In fact, ratepayers bore well over \$200

billion in cost overruns for completed nuclear plants, while taxpayers and ratepayers shared in paying off most of the more than \$40 billion in costs of abandoned plants. Face it, you have a very poor track record of predicting construction costs and avoiding cost overruns. Indeed, the actual costs of 75 of the first generation of U.S. nuclear power plants built from 1966 to 1977 exceeded initial estimates by more than 200 percent—meaning that the actual costs were more than triple their projected costs.

Mr. Burns: Don't you think I know that! We don't want to burn our shareholders again, and those ratepayers are so damn uptight about paying for our costly mistakes. That's why this time we're shifting the risk to taxpayers. What's the big deal? The federal government has bailed out plenty of industries, so what's one more – namely, mine?!
[Shaking his head the Ghost exits]

[Sign for Act II: The Ghost of Nukes Present]

[To Self] Mr. Burns: Clean, safe and affordable energy, Bah Humbug. Things have changed. Just because past attempts to build nuclear reactors resulted in the *largest managerial disaster* in business history, doesn't mean history is going to repeat itself?

[Enter Ghost of Nukes Present]

Ghost: Really?

Mr. Burns: Now, who are you?

Ghost: I'm Wall Street, the ghost of nukes present.

Mr. Burns: Clearly.

Ghost: You think you've learned? Do I need to remind you that estimated costs for constructing new nuclear reactors have increased four-fold since 2001? This year alone, cost estimates have ranged from 8.4 cents per kilowatt-hour to a high of 30 cents. Look no further than Finland – site of the France flagship reactor, the same reactor that's proposed for Maryland – to see that history is in fact already beginning to repeat itself. The project is currently at least 3 years behind schedule with nearly a \$3 billion increase from its original \$4.5 billion cost estimate. Meanwhile back here in the U.S., two of the reactor designs that the Department of Energy is on the verge of financing with taxpayer money are not only not certified by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, but they have been singled out for significant safety design flaws by regulators here and abroad.

Mr. Burns: Look, I don't need you confusing me with facts. Maybe nothing's changed, but this is our big chance to hitch our wagon to all the concern about the climate crisis. Even though nuclear power costs way too much and takes way too long, and has never solved its inherent risks of nuclear weapons proliferation, accidents or attacks releasing catastrophic radioactivity, its forever deadly radioactive waste dilemma, and its "routine" releases of radiation and toxic chemicals at each step in the uranium fuel chain, we've already spent godzillions of dollars convincing the public and bribing – er, educating their elected leaders, that nuclear power is clean and the solution to global warming.

Ghost: [walks Mr. Burns to the sun and wind who are crying]

Mr. Burns: What's their problem?

Ghost: They are clean, affordable, safe, quickly deployable, secure, sustainable – the real solutions to climate change.

Mr. Burns: Bah Humbug.

Ghost: ...and the private sector is investing in them

Mr. Burns: Ouch, that hurts.

Ghost: They say to transform our energy sector to address global warming and set us on a path toward a sustainable future we need policy that mandates robust energy efficiency standards coupled with rapid deployment of genuinely clean energy technology. [exit]

Mr. Burns: Does 10 years count as rapid? [Enter Ghost of Nukes Future]

[Sign Act III: Ghost of Nukes Future]

Ghost: No, 10 years is too late to start reducing carbon emissions.

Mr. Burns: Let me guess, Ghost of Nukes Future?

Ghost: That's right, and I might be the future, but I happen to know that it took 23 years to bring the last reactor built in the US online. Nukes Past told me over drinks.
[continues]

Ghost: Unfortunately, Mr. Burns, if you get your way, the nuclear power industry will transfer hundreds of billions of dollars of new reactor debt repayments onto the American taxpayers when they default on their loans. We will bet the farm on the Nuclear Renaissance, but the costs will continue to skyrocket, and major safety flaws will lead to long construction schedule delays. Worse still, the reactors that actually will be completed and generate electricity will cost ratepayers an arm and a leg – in fact, trillions more had the same electricity been saved by efficiency or generated by renewables. And perhaps worst of all, harmful radiation and toxic chemicals will be released at every stage of the uranium fuel chain, and forever deadly high-level radioactive wastes will mount, with no solution in sight. And did I mention the climate crisis will grow to nightmarish proportions, because efficiency and renewables – the real solutions – will be crowded out of the marketplace by the heavily subsidized nuclear power industry. In short, we will not only face a bleak nuclear winter, but we will also face hellish global warming.

[Sign Final Act: Epiphany]

Mr. DOE: Mr. Burns here's a little early holiday gift from the folks on Capitol Hill [DOE guy presents huge bags of money]. Sun, Wind, Efficiency, congrats you get what's left [distributes a few coins to each]. Now, don't go spending it all in one place.

Mr. Burns: But I understand now. I get it. I've seen the light [pause], and felt the wind, and you too sweet under-appreciated efficiency. By greenwashing nuclear power and taking the lion's share of federal subsidies I've only maintained the toxic energy status quo and suppressed transition to a clean energy economy with plenty of well paid green jobs for all. Here [gives money to Efficiency, Sun and Wind] go forth and prosper!

Mr. DOE: I mean, yeah, I guess that makes sense.

Sun, Wind and Efficiency: God Bless Us, Everyone

