

As Closure Nears, Debate Over Diablo Canyon Persists

By Elizabeth McCarthy Published On: February 16, 2022



Calls to keep the half-century-old Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Plant from closing mid-decade are getting louder.

During a Feb. 15 House Select Committee on the Climate Crisis hearing focused on creating a clean, affordable and reliable grid, two Republican committee members insisted the large nuclear plant on California's Central Coast is needed to keep the state's grid reliable, to lower greenhouse gases and tamp down electricity rates. That's even though the 2,200 megawatt plant was forced offline four times over the last two years because of coolant issues in one of the two generating units.

Rep. Garrett Graves (R-LA) said California was an example of what not to do in pursuing a clean and cost-effective grid. He said that after agreeing to close Diablo Canyon, the state proceeded to waive Clean Air Act limits to allow more fossil-fueled generation during the summers of 2020 and 2021. What he did not point out was that the facility went offline due to a coolant malfunction at a time the grid needed it during intense late summer heat last year.

Graves slammed California's high electricity rates, which are five times those in Louisiana, adding the state's transmission system was the most unreliable in the country. However, that ran counter to testimony at the Tuesday hearing that Michigan has the most unreliable grid in the U.S., followed by Texas.

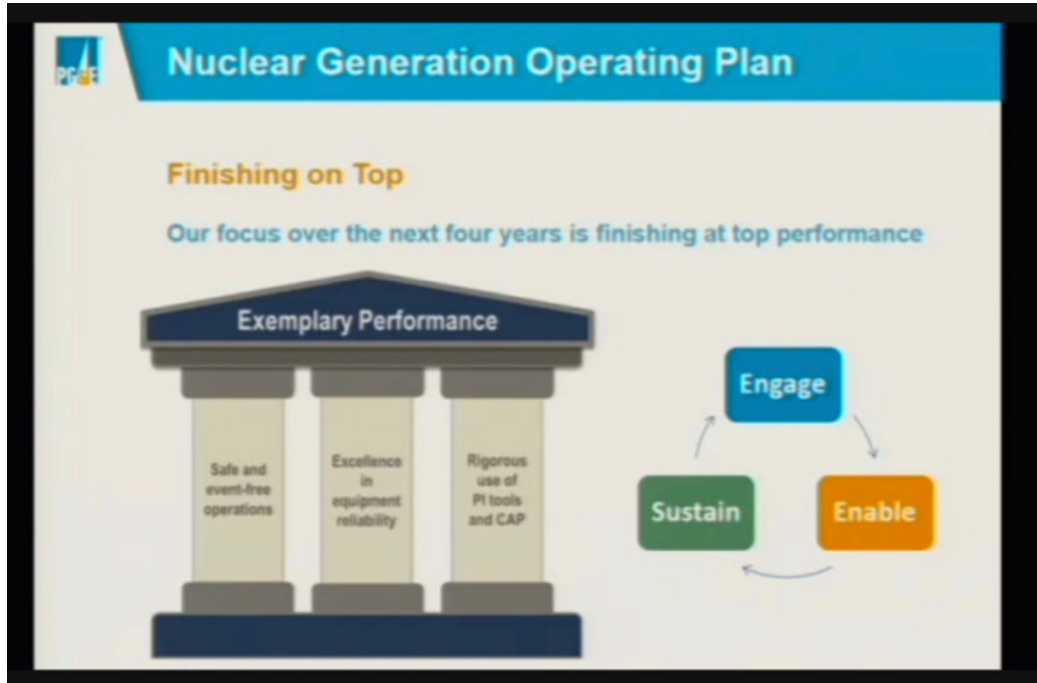
Rep. Anthony Gonzales (R-OH) said shutting down Diablo Canyon or any of the country's nuclear plants "is insane." He also pointed to the Stanford University-Massachusetts report from last November that concluded that keeping Diablo Canyon online an extra decade past the expiration of its federal operating license would save \$2.6 billion in energy costs. It would also reduce carbon pollution by 10% with the electricity produced. Gonzales added that the additional solar power needed to fill in the capacity gap would require 900,000 acres compared to Diablo Canyon's footprint of 900 acres.

Earlier this month, former Energy Secretary Steven Chu together with more than 70 scientists and others urged Gov. Gavin Newsom in a letter to keep the plant running to avoid increasing greenhouse gases.

"We are convinced that it is impossible to replace the carbon-free electric output of Diablo Canyon at or near the time the plants are scheduled to close," the letter states. It adds that even if California could replace Diablo Canyon at the time of its closure, the "right goal is to reduce carbon emissions as fast as possible, and the right means to do that is to add renewables on top of Diablo Canyon's carbon-free energy, not in place of that energy."

There is no indication that plant owner PG&E will reverse course. Its closure decision back in 2016 was based on economics. "So, who is going to pull out their checkbook" to keep the plant running? David Weisman, spokesperson for the Alliance for Nuclear Responsibility, asked.

He told Current that during the Feb.15 meeting of the Diablo Canyon Independent Safety Committee, PG&E officials detailed their final refueling of the plant set for 2023. Every 18 months, a third of the uranium is depleted and must be replaced.



PG&E slide from Feb. 15 Diablo Canyon Independent Safety Meeting

Weisman also noted that by the end of the current quarter, PG&E will have chosen the vendor who will make additional storage casks needed to quickly offload the spent fuel at the time of the plant's closure.

The closure decision also "is not reversible" for political reasons, Weisman said, noting that it is an election year and PG&E is one of Newsom's biggest campaign contributors.

Share this story

f

🐦

