

POLITICS IN MINNESOTA

Sensible Energy Solutions sings

by Sarah Janecek

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Rare is the newly formed interest group lobbying the legislature that starts out with a politically savvy bang.

Such was the case just before Thanksgiving when Sensible Energy Solutions for Minnesota (SESM) held a press conference with U.S. Reps. Erik Paulsen (R-MN 3) and Tim Walz (D-MN1) asking legislators to repeal the moratorium that prevents the Public Utilities Commission from authorizing construction of new nuclear facilities. As most of our readers know, Xcel Energy operates two plants in Minnesota, near Monticello and Red Wing.

Longtime Capitol public policy players will recall that the moratorium was a key part of the extremely contentious debate and deal struck in 1993 that allowed the Prairie Island nuclear power plant to increase the number of nuclear waste dry storage casks stored on site. A number of current legislators cut their chops on the issue back then, including these legislators who are still serving and who served on the environment committee in 1993: Sens. Ellen Anderson (DFL-St. Paul), Steve Dille (R-Litchfield), Dennis Frederickson (R-New Ulm), Gen Olson (R-Minnetrista) and Pat Pariseau (R-Farmington), then-Rep. and now Sen. Tom Bakk (DFL-Cook) and Reps. Alice Hausman (DFL-St. Paul) and Tom Hackbarth (R-Ham Lake).

Bills have been introduced in both chambers the last few years to repeal the moratorium. Last year, it easily passed the Senate (42-24) as an amendment to the omnibus energy bill, but the amendment failed on the same bill in the House (72-60). All the Republicans voted to repeal, except for Rep. Jim Abeler (R-Coon Rapids). Dille and Rep. Tom Emmer (R-Delano) missed the votes, and we're told that the two will likely vote for the repeal. That means that lifting the moratorium comes down to changing about a half-dozen DFL votes in the House.

Certainly the politics of nuclear power have changed dramatically since 1993. Starting at the top, the issue no longer easily divides along party lines. Last month, President Barack Obama said, "There's no reason why technologically we can't employ nuclear energy in a safe and effective way. Japan does it, and France does it, and it doesn't have greenhouse gas emissions, so it would be stupid for us not to do that in a much more effective way." For a further review of the policy change, check out "Nuclear power regains support...tool against climate change...even green groups see it as 'part of the answer'" in the Washington Post.

In Minnesota, an added impetus to repeal the moratorium is the demise of the Big Stone II power plant and the impending power needs in greater Minnesota. Check out the editorials in the Bemidji Pioneer [here](#) and the St. Cloud Times [here](#).

Another key part of the changed politics is the impact of labor on DFLers. Check out the SESM's board of advisers, a diverse coalition of labor, business and environmental state leaders:

Carl Crimmins, president, Minnesota Pipe Trades Association
Cyndi Leshner, former president and CEO, Northern States Power
Harry Melander, president, Minnesota Building Trades Council
Scott Melbye, president, Cameco Inc.

David Olson, president, Minnesota Chamber of Commerce
Richard J. Vetter, Ph.D., professor of biophysics
Don McMillan, president, Minnesota Outdoor Heritage Alliance
Tim Hartigan, president, Metalcasters of Minnesota
Dan Puhl, CPA

Typically, congressmen calling on the Legislature to do something has about as much impact as legislators calling on Congress to do something (zilch). But with Paulsen and Walz, we're not so sure. Walz was a really big get for the SESM. The press coverage last week was impressive, particularly because last week's announcement was not orchestrated out of either Paulsen's or Walz' offices.

Who's behind the SESM's big bang? Widely respected GOP public affairs consultants Ben Golnik and Tom Steward. Besides its website, SESM is on Facebook and Twitter.