

May 1, 2026

Governor Bob Ferguson
Office of the Governor
P.O. Box 40002
Olympia, Washington

Dear Governor Ferguson,

We write to you on behalf of the Washington Clean Energy Coalition, a group of volunteers, many with energy expertise, who advocate for clean energy in Washington State. We regularly provide comments at Integrated System Planning meetings for Puget Sound Energy and testify before the Utilities and Transportation Commission.

We appreciate your leadership in advancing clean energy in this state as well as the vitrification of nuclear waste at Hanford.

Today we would like to share our concerns regarding the development of nuclear energy facilities in our state. We realize that there is uncertainty about how to reach our climate goals and maintain resource adequacy, given growing demands for energy in our state. We believe that these needs can be met and state emissions reduction goals can be satisfied using smart combinations of solar, wind, batteries, hydro, and geothermal generation, avoiding the cost and dangers of nuclear facilities.

Cost. As you know, the cost of nuclear energy is extremely high, approximately 3-5 times more than other forms of energy. We worry that the cost of nuclear facilities will be passed on to ratepayers or taxpayers. This has already happened in the 2023-25 legislative session in which \$25 million of Washington taxpayer money was allocated from the capital budget to support the development of Small Modular Reactors (SMRs). (1) It also happened in the 2026 Washington legislative session in which a tax abatement was passed that will be used to support the development of a nuclear fuel plant in Richland, fuel to be used for SMRs.

The Small Modular Reactor (SMR) that Bill Gates' Terrapower is building in Wyoming is estimated to cost \$4 billion. (2) And the partnership between Amazon and Energy Northwest to build at least four SMRs in Richland is estimated to cost more than \$2 billion just for the planning, design and permitting. Total costs are unknown. (3)

A second cost concern about SMRs is their fuel. SMRs require fuel composed of uranium enriched up to 20%, much higher than fuel for large reactors, which is enriched only up to 5%. The enrichment process is extremely expensive.

Safety Risk. The spent fuel from all reactors is radioactive, but the spent fuel from SMRs is even more dangerous because of its higher level of enrichment. Currently there is no facility available in the U.S. to store spent fuel over the long term. And for shorter-term

storage, as you well know, Hanford is already dealing with more high-level waste than it can safely handle. Lacking storage facilities, existing nuclear waste is being stored on the site where it is generated. The Union of Concerned Scientists notes: “Any community with an SMR will have to plan to be a de facto long-term nuclear waste disposal site.”(4)

The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation have expressed strong concerns about this safety risk. Their Feb. 7, 2024 letter to the state legislature stated, “The CTUIR does **NOT** support the deployment of Small Modular Nuclear Reactors (SMNR) or any new/additive nuclear missions at or near the Hanford Site.” (5)

An additional safety concern is the recent elimination of 790 pages of federal regulations for the safe handling of nuclear materials. The deleted regulations include protections for groundwater, drinking water, and workers’ exposure to radiation. (6)

Alternatives. The time it takes to build a Small Modular Reactor appears to be between 6 and 10 years. In contrast, progress on alternatives continues to advance at an impressive rate. Solar is currently the cheapest form of new energy with wind a close second. More than 200,000 megawatts of renewable energy in the Pacific Northwest await Bonneville Power’s sign off. (7) We hope the governor will strongly back the work of the new transmission committee as well as pressing BPA to connect and manage these projects.

The cost of batteries continues to decline and capacities are rapidly expanding. Google recently announced a solar and wind powered data center in Minnesota with a 30 GWh back-up battery with the ability to run for 100 hours. (8) Geothermal is also experiencing major breakthroughs with capacity to provide firm back-up power at large scales. By the time the first generation of SMRs can be in operation, other options will have far outpaced nuclear in their ability to provide low-cost, reliable energy.

Your position. Nuclear energy is becoming a widely discussed issue in the state of Washington. The public deserves to know where our governor stands on key issues related to nuclear energy. We request that you state your positions on the following issues:

- Is nuclear necessary to achieve our climate goals and meet our energy needs?
- Can clean energy sources meet our needs without the risks of nuclear?
- Will taxpayers and ratepayers be expected to subsidize nuclear energy?
- Are there realistic safe options to store spent nuclear fuel?
- Will we address tribal concerns about storage of nuclear waste?
- What security measures should be provided around nuclear facilities?

We appreciate your leadership for our state. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

The Washington Clean Energy Coalition

- 1) <https://www.power-eng.com/nuclear/smps/washington-state-lawmakers-allocate-25-million-to-advance-smr-development/>
- 2) <https://enki.ai.com/data-center/terrapowers-natrium-smr-powers-ai-future-in-2025>
- 3) <https://www.geekwire.com/2025/a-first-look-at-the-amazon-backed-next-generation-nuclear-facility-planned-for-washington-state/>
- 4) <https://blog.ucl.org/edwin-lyman/five-things-the-nuclear-bros-dont-want-you-to-know-about-small-modular-reactors/>
- 5) <https://drive.google.com/file/d/14OoQT7kf0l5uIIA-8wmfWeQRD6F5cv7n/view>
- 6) <https://www.npr.org/2026/01/28/nx-s1-5677187/nuclear-safety-rules-rewritten-trump>
- 7) <https://www.propublica.org/article/oregon-washington-green-energy-bonneville>
- 8) <https://interestingengineering.com/energy/worlds-largest-battery-plan-for-google>

Cc: Lt. Governor Denny Heck
House Environment and Energy Committee
Senate Environment, Energy & Technology Committee
House State Government and Tribal Relations Committee
Senate Labor, Commerce and Tribal Affairs Committee