

# Martha's Monthly

Feminist analysis of public policy in Alberta



Martha's Monthly  
July 2009

## It Left a Bad Taste in His Mouth

**W**hen Martha's children were much younger one of them took a fancy to eating dirt. Initially it would be small tastes taken furtively. Later, he began to take handfuls of the warm earth and shove it in his mouth with glee. Martha found the whole thing fascinating. She especially enjoyed the horror that his practice would elicit amongst other mothers at the park. Inevitably one would plead with Martha to "Tell him it doesn't taste good" to which Martha chose to respond, "Should the bad taste in his mouth not tell him that already?" Martha's son eventually shoved enough dirt in his mouth that he gagged and spat it out on the ground. "Yucky", he sputtered, "dirt yucky". He was two and had discovered that the bad taste in his mouth was the dirt he had been shoving in it for the past few months.

Martha's son may have been a little slower learner than many of your children but she thinks he is a faster learner than the Alberta government who keeps shoving dirt in its mouth and has yet to notice it tastes so bad. **For a few years the Alberta government has flirted with the Nuclear Industry about introducing nuclear power production to Alberta and it has yet to occur to them that "nuclear yucky".** Martha feels a little like she did when she watched her son, "Does the ridiculous costs, tremendous risks, and utter environmental damage of a nuclear power plant NOT leave the worst taste in a government's mouth or must we explain it to them slowly??"

Apparently we need to explain it to them slowly. Nuclear power production is NOT green, NOT cheap, and NOT safe. Here is the issue summed up by the Pembina Institute:

78 per cent of Albertans surveyed said they are in favor of the government providing subsidies to



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and NOT safe.***



***Private capital will not invest in nuclear power production!***

renewable energy, as opposed to continuing past practice of subsidizing the oil and gas industry. In spite of this, the Government of Alberta has never given any financial assistance to renewable energy development.

No energy supply is a magic bullet and all have their impacts. But some are cleaner, less costly, and a lot less risky than others. Not one of 20 nuclear reactors built in Ontario has been completed on budget or on time and total cost overruns topped \$14 billion.

[\(Pembina Institute\)](#)

In a May, 2001 cover story in The Economist nuclear power was noted to have failed because of the costs, not because of other concerns: "Nuclear power, once claimed to be too cheap to meter, is now too costly to matter". There are plenty of problems with nuclear (see [Sierra Club doc](#) for details) but let's put aside concerns over all the wasted water in nuclear power production, all the risks of terrorist attacks, and all the elevated tritium levels in the area around a plant. Let's just consider **co\$**t.

The Nuclear Power industry has started to lobby the Alberta government really hard because, and here is the nugget of truth you need to know, **private capital will not invest in nuclear power production**. Private capital (ie. *rich guys with money to burn*) will invest in struggling sport franchises, failing car companies, and doomed Ponzi schemes but they won't put their money into nuclear power production. That should tell us something. It should make us run far from nuclear power. And nearly every nation in the world has run away (all nuclear plants in production are in developing countries like India and communist countries like China). No new nuclear power plant has been built in Canada for three decades. You know why? Nuclear yucky. And nuclear pricey.

Finland started to build a nuclear power plant four years ago. Here is how the New York Times described the cost overruns and problems with construction:

After four years of construction and thousands of defects and deficiencies, the reactor's 3 billion euro price tag, about \$4.2 billion, has climbed at least 50



percent. And while the reactor was originally meant to be completed this summer, Areva, the French company building it, and the utility that ordered it, are no longer willing to make certain predictions on when it will go online. (see: [NY Times](#))

Can you imagine what that kind of investment in renewable energy could do? Hey, no need to wonder, many people have done the math and it is clear that Alberta could meet its electricity demands in 20 years without coal fired or nuclear plants. We could rely on renewables and be a green energy giant (see [Greening the Grid report](#)). And we could do it for far less than the cost of building four nuclear power plants in Northern Alberta.

Martha never debated the taste of dirt with her child; she just waited until he realized it tasted yucky. Martha has no intention of debating nuclear power with the Alberta government because they should be able to tell what a bad taste it leaves in everyone's mouth. **Let's just ask for what we want** – an electrical production plan that relies on renewable production and that puts our investment into renewable production, not coal-fired and nuclear plants.



If you think Alberta should be an energy leader, not a nuclear follower, then write to your MLA and the Premier. We have included a suggested letter but your own words are always better. Copy and paste these addresses into your TO: line and [send your letter to:](#)

[premier@gov.ab.ca](mailto:premier@gov.ab.ca), [marthasmonthly@yahoo.ca](mailto:marthasmonthly@yahoo.ca), [minister.energy@gov.ab.ca](mailto:minister.energy@gov.ab.ca), [grandeprairie.smoky@assembly.ab.ca](mailto:grandeprairie.smoky@assembly.ab.ca), [edmonton.riverview@assembly.ab.ca](mailto:edmonton.riverview@assembly.ab.ca), [edmonton.highlandsnorwood@assembly.ab.ca](mailto:edmonton.highlandsnorwood@assembly.ab.ca)

July 27, 2009

Dear Premier Stelmach and Energy Minister Knight:

The recent nuclear power survey conducted by the Alberta government made little mention of one of the most important topics when it comes to nuclear power production and that is the huge public spending that is required to get a plant ready to produce power. In numerous countries in Europe, and now in Ontario, governments concerned about the skyrocketing costs have halted nuclear power plant construction. The costs are so unpredictable that private investors are unwilling to put their money into nuclear power production so the full costs of these plants fall to governments and taxpayers. Frankly, I am unwilling to accept nuclear power in Alberta because of the costs to the taxpayers.

I believe that the Alberta government should reject nuclear power production on the basis of the costs and instead consider some investment into the production of renewable energy. Alberta could be the renewable energy capital of the world, making us a real leader. Nuclear power production is yesterday's technology but renewable energy is tomorrow's technology and it comes at a much smaller cost, both financial and environmental.

I urge your government to make Alberta a leader in renewable energy production and reject the costly option of nuclear power.

Sincerely,

YOUR NAME AND FULL ADDRESS