

Bill lifting nuclear ban approved

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A bill to lift Kentucky's nuclear moratorium - guided by local legislators - has been approved by the General Assembly and is headed to the desk of Gov. Matt Bevin.

The House of Representatives approved Senate Bill 11 on Wednesday by a vote of 65-28. The measure was approved by the Senate last week.

State Rep. Steven Rudy, R-Paducah, presented the bill in the House and, along with State Rep. Gerald Watkins, D-Paducah, answered questions during floor debate about the possible impact on the state's coal industry and environmental concerns. State Sen. Danny Carroll, R-Paducah, sponsored the bill in the Senate.

"We cleared another hurdle," Rudy said. "This is further than we've ever been before. Hopefully SB 11 will become law in a very short time."

The governor has stated his support for the bill and the opportunities nuclear power could provide the commonwealth.

During floor debate, State Rep. Jim Gooch Jr., R-Providence, said he was not opposed to nuclear power but felt choices for which fuels to pursue was a regional concern.

"We're really hurting here," Gooch said. "I don't believe this bill does that much to affect coal, but it's a kick in the teeth our coal industry shouldn't be facing now. We don't have to do that."

Rudy said the debate was expected.

"There are always going to be some concerns, certainly from the coal industry and the environmental side," he said. "I think we made enough concessions to get most people with environmental concerns on board. There was acknowledgement that we need a more diverse portfolio. Coal is still critical to our energy portfolio ... but I think nuclear can be part of it as well."

Watkins, who has presented similar bills in the House in previous years, said he was thrilled with its passage.

"I'm just so excited. This was the highest priority for the Paducah-McCracken County area - and it's good for the commonwealth. We're an energy-producing state and this is a good piece of legislation to put us even further in the forefront of energy production that means job creation, good jobs."

According to Watkins, valid points were raised during the floor debate about waste disposal and other issues.

"The (nuclear) industry has grown a lot, learned a lot and improved a lot," he said.

Lifting the ban has long been a priority of the Paducah Area Chamber of Commerce, according to Sandra Wilson, the chamber's president. It was also supported by the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce, Kentucky Association of Manufacturers, Kentucky League of Cities and Kentucky Association of Counties.

"This is a significant move forward for our community, region and state," Wilson said. "Thank you to Sen. Carroll and Reps. Rudy and Watson for the work they have done on this bill."

The measure lifts the moratorium on the construction of nuclear power plants in Kentucky which has been in place since 1984.

Carroll added a short title for the measure to be known as the "Robert J. Leeper Act." That was in recognition of the work Leeper, who preceded Carroll in the District 2 Senate seat, put toward lifting the ban during his tenure in the legislature.

"I'm very pleased," Leeper said. "I appreciate the effort, especially of Sen. Carroll and Rep. Rudy, who championed the bill through their chambers. The number of votes on both sides was substantial, and I'm very pleased with that. I appreciate the thoughtfulness of the debate on the floor. The end result is very positive for Paducah."