

Trip Synopsis, NA-YGN Activities Grand Gulf Early Site Permit, Draft Environmental Impact Statement

- **Live TV and Radio Interviews**
- **Clean Green Power Machine Rally, State Capitol Building, Jackson**
- **DEIS Hearing, Port Gibson**

On Monday, June 27, NA-YGN members Bill Casino, Kelly Taylor, and myself took vacation from our day jobs and left for Jackson, MS. Skip Hartman (a friend of Kelly's) provided transportation via his single-engine, four-seater plane from Louisa airfield, which was a convenient and exciting way to travel! We arrived in Jackson around 4:30 PM CDT.



Live TV and Radio Interviews

Our schedule was packed with activities. Starting at 4:15 Monday morning, Kelly Taylor, Scott Peterson (Vice President of Communications, NEI), and I headed to WAPT Channel 16 for a live televised interview. Channel 16 had attempted to get an anti-nuclear person for the interview, but was unable to find one.



Michael Stuart and Scott Peterson on Channel 16

During the interview, Scott Peterson and I fielded questions such as: Why nuclear energy? Why now? What about Chernobyl? What about the pollution and waste? We were able to provide strong, positive statements for each and every question. When asked about the waste, I even produced a plastic fuel pellet from my pocket and handed it to the interviewer. I don't have a transcript (I'm still waiting for the tape), but here's a close approximation of what I said:

[Holding up fuel pellet, for the camera to get a close-up]

“This is what it looks like when it goes in, and this is what it looks like when it comes out. It is a solid ceramic and will not leak into anything. Waste is actually one of the best things going for nuclear because it is able to provide tremendous amounts of energy for an extremely small amount of waste. This waste can be contained and monitored. The best news is that nuclear ‘waste’ is not waste at all. There’s still a tremendous amount of energy in the used nuclear fuel, which will ultimately be put to use when the fuel is recycled.”

Scott Peterson was phenomenal. We have a lot of sound bytes to learn from the master.

At the exact same time that our interview was being broadcast, Jim Reinsh (president of ANS and Bechtel) and Norris McDonald (president of the African-American Environmentalist Association) were being interviewed live before the cameras of WLBT Channel 3. I have not seen their interview, but they also were unopposed by anti-nuclear representatives.

Later that day, Kelly Taylor and Bill Casino were interviewed on the Gallo Radio Show on WFMN-FM 97.3. Jim Riccio (a nuclear policy analyst for Greenpeace) represented the anti-nuclear voices this time, along with a local citizen from Mississippi named Ruth.



Kelly Taylor and Bill Casino with Paul Gallo

During the interview the anti-nuclear voices were so talkative in expressing their usual emotional opposition to nuclear energy that even Paul Gallo was having trouble getting a word in. At several points Jim and Ruth were even talking over each other. Eventually, Kelly and Bill figured out that unless they were willing to talk over top of Jim and Ruth, they weren't going to get a word in edgewise.

The good news was that Paul Gallo was obviously skeptical about the anti-nuclear propaganda and posed some very good questions. At one point, while Jim Riccio was talking about how easy it would be for a terrorist to get into the control room to melt the reactor, Paul asked if Jim would demonstrate how easy it was to gain access to a nuclear facility by trying to do it, himself. If he was successful, he could come back and tell his listeners about it. Kelly then told him: (again, paraphrasing) “I was an operator at a nuclear facility. I held a license to operate the reactor for five years, and I’m telling you that you are wrong. If you want to know how it works, then you should take the word of a licensed professional instead of gleaning your information from reading some web site.”

Clean Green Power Machine Rally, State Capitol Building, Jackson

The noon rally on the capitol steps was a tremendous success. It was incredibly hot, but regardless of the heat, about 85 committed people, including guest speakers, interested citizens, and news media personnel attended the hour-long rally.



South Steps, State Capitol Building, Jackson

Master of Ceremonies, Grand Gulf Site VP, George Williams, introduced each speaker to a cheering audience of supporters. As far as I could tell there were no anti-nuclear activists present. Speakers included:

- Jim Reinsch, President of ANS and Bechtel, who shared the national perspective of nuclear energy.
- Amelda Arnold, Mayor of Port Gibson, who described the local perspective and voiced the strong community support.
- Norris McDonald, President of AAEA, who addressed the environmental justice issues, and led the rally attendees in several energetic chants.
- As the, Public Information Officer of NA-YGN, I stated that I was representing hundreds of young professionals who are entering the industry, who care about the environment and have a stake in the future.
- James Miller, Claiborne County Administrator, who echoed Mayor Arnold's statements by reiterating the strong local support for building a new nuclear facility at Grand Gulf.
- Scott Peterson, who spoke eloquently about the benefits of nuclear energy.



Mayor Amelda Arnold and Norris McDonald

It was an overwhelmingly positive rally. The heat did not dampen our spirits at all.

Afterwards, Kelly Taylor and I decided to stay for the scheduled anti-nuclear rally. While waiting, I was interviewed by a member of the Jackson Free Press who asked about the waste issue. I again produced the pellet and explained to him that when compared to the waste emitted by competing, viable energy supplies, the amount of waste is incredibly small, and best of all – able to be recycled.

Finding the anti-nuclear “rally” was like playing “Where’s Waldo?” There were so few protesters, they were hard to find. Easy to spot were Brendan Hoffman of Public Citizen (who was not surprised to see us this time) and Paul Gunter of NIRS. Eventually, about 20 people gathered inside the rotunda. During their rally, which was more like a small press conference, they made claims of environmental injustice – how the industry wanted to site the reactor in Port Gibson because it was a “poor, African-American community.” I find this an odd assertion, since none of the other sites going through the ESP process are similarly located.

The highlight of the anti-nuclear rally was an ice sculpture of a cooling tower and a fuel pool, which were supposed to represent a meltdown. These sculptures were finished with dry ice to provide steam from the top of the structures. Notably absent from this display was the only thing at the plant that can even theoretically melt down – the reactor core. But fiction was a running theme for this rally.



Landon Huey speaks at the anti-nuclear rally while the ice sculptures “melt” down.

The only apparent reporter covering the event was from the Jackson Free Press and was the same one who interviewed me earlier. He performed a reality check by asking us a couple of questions related to the statements being made by the anti-nuclear speakers. We were able to provide our perspective on these statements, which he seemed happy to hear. At one point, he asked, “Well how about that cool ice-sculpture?” To which I responded, “You need a lot of glitz and glamour to make up for lack of substance.” Harsh, but true.

DEIS Hearing, Port Gibson

Port Gibson is a small town. The meeting was held in the Port Gibson City Hall. Most people expected about 100 attendees maximum at the meeting. There were about 160 in attendance. An overflow room with a video feed was set up for those who couldn't get a seat in the meeting room upstairs. The outside of the building was decorated with a lot of colorful pro-nuclear signs and banners and there was an information table, which was manned by local ANS members.



Port Gibson City Hall

There were 21 public comments: 14 were for, 5 against, and 2 neutral. Of the five who spoke against, two were from Washington, D.C., two local people were anti-nuclear, and the remaining person had nothing to say about nuclear power at all. Those with



About 160 people attended the NRC meeting.

objections most often cited hard feelings over the unusual tax structure in Mississippi, in which the utilities' tax payments go first to the State of Mississippi and then the State divides the revenue among several localities. Among those who spoke in opposition were: Paul Gunter, Brendan Hoffman, and Evan Doss. Evan is the former tax collector for Claiborne County, and a former office holder in the NAACP. He is locally well known for his opposition to the current tax structure related to the existing nuclear power station at Grand Gulf. Conspicuously absent from the meeting were the emotional rants about cancer and radiation poisoning, and – besides Brendan and Paul – the people who attended the anti-nuclear rally.

Claiborne County is nearly unanimous in support of a new reactor. We were told that citizens in the community do not respond favorably when people from outside the community arrive and try to claim the proposed siting is an environmental injustice, particularly when the community which is 85% African-American is eagerly seeking the new development.

The meeting ended about 10:30, after Chip Cameron, the NRC mediator, asked if anyone else wished to comment that had not signed up, and there were no takers.

Right before the NRC meeting started at 7PM, another ice sculpture mock-up of a cooling tower and a spent fuel pool were set up on the front lawn to represent a nuclear meltdown. Both structures were still in place when the meeting ended at 10:30 PM, even though the outdoor temperature was about 85° F – ironically, one could interpret the sculpture as demonstrating that it is extremely difficult to cause a meltdown, even when you're trying.

In summary, this was the best pro-nuclear trip yet. The enthusiasm and energy of local ANS members and nuclear professionals, active participation by local government officials, media coverage, and the support of the NEI, NA-YGN, and ANS organizations all contributed to make this event and outstanding success!

