

Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists

The Bulletin interview: John Rowe - Power Player

September/October 2008

At the heart of Exelon Corporation's electricity-generating capacity are 17 nuclear reactors—the largest nuclear fleet in the United States. With so much experience operating nuclear plants, why is Exelon tepid about being the first company to order a new nuclear power plant in more than two decades? One reason could be the know-how of chief executive officer John Rowe. "I've seen the cycle of politics and economics of nuclear energy, in different capacities, since 1970. It gives me a very complicated view of the importance of nuclear energy in a low-carbon world and the business risks of building nuclear power plants," Rowe says.

In his lengthy career as a utility executive, Rowe has licensed new nuclear plants and shut them down when alternatives were cheaper. With economic and political conditions shifting within the last decade, Rowe is edging Exelon toward adding an 18th reactor. The company is applying for a combined construction and operating license to build a reactor in southeast Texas and also holds the option of adding a reactor to its existing Clinton, Illinois, plant.

Yet, Rowe is cautious. "I'm in business," he says. "My job is to build things that provide efficient power and make money for my investors." Is a nuclear reactor one of those "things"? Rowe sat down with the *Bulletin* to spell out the economic and political conditions necessary for a new age of nuclear power.