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# Our future is in green energy not aging, costly nuclear plants

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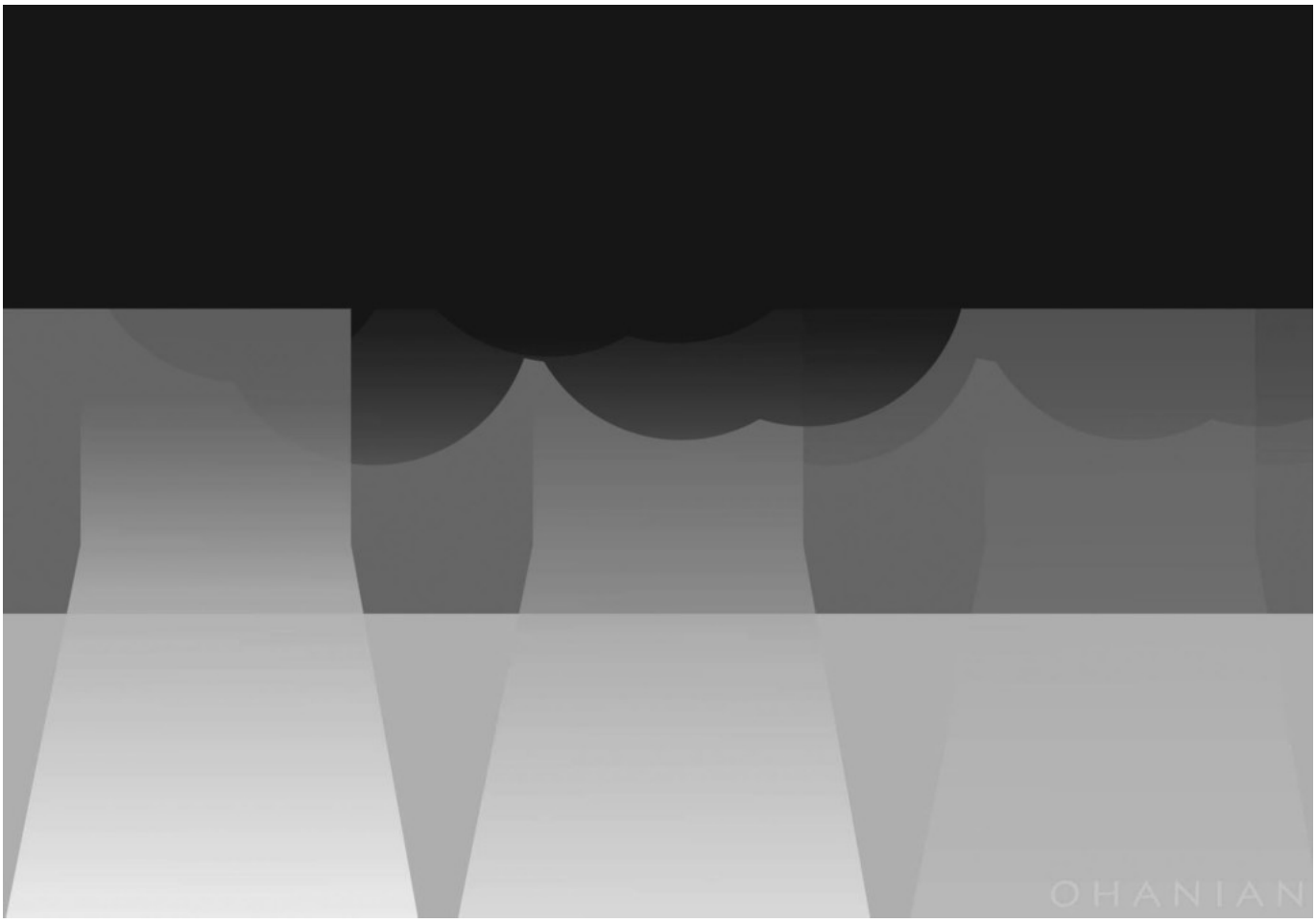



Nancy Ohanian / Op Art (Nancy Ohanian)

**Washington state's nuclear power plant — WPPSS 2 — is a relic of an energy plan begun in the 1960s and built with technology from the 1970s. It is an 8-Track tape player in an iPad world.**

By

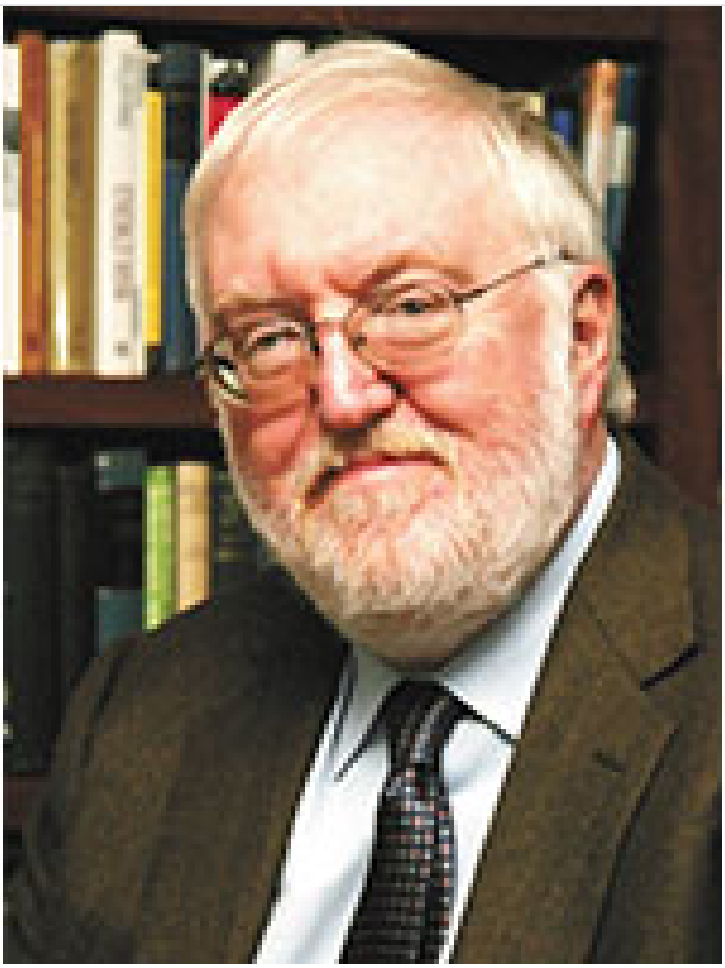
*Special to The Times*

I READ James Moss' recent Op-Ed ["Nuclear: a carbon-free solution," Opinion, June 17] with interest and some amusement. The interest reflects whether Washington's aging and very expensive nuclear plant is a good use for our energy dollars. Moss is doing a good job for his union constituents and takes a position I normally support. Sadly, we may not be on the same side regarding the costs.

The nuclear station, now called the Columbia Generating Station (CGS), was once known as Washington Public Power Supply System No. 2. This is a relic of an energy plan begun in the 1960s and built with technology from the 1970s. It is an 8-track tape player in an iPad world. The prices of electric power have plummeted over the years as renewables have sharply declined in price, natural gas is facing a glut and new technologies from LED lighting to rooftop solar have arrived.

Over the past four years, the market price of power that is produced from CGS has been only a bit more than half what it cost to produce it. We recently reviewed the cost and value data for our Northwest clients and found that ratepayers had paid more than $500 million more in cost than the energy was worth since 2012. We know that given the lower prices today, running the plant for the next four years will cost the region $800 million more than the value of the power it produces. Put another way, we could pay each employee of the nuclear plant a $500,000 severance and still have money left over for wind generators and solar panels.

Why is the plant so expensive? It is in a poor location — competing with far less costly renewable resources like wind and hydroelectricity. When the wind blows and the rivers surge, we have to turn off these resources, since the nuclear plant can't adjust its output like alternative-energy resources. We have no storage solution for the nuclear waste that is being stored in its elevated spent fuel pool and in dry casks outside the plant. The plant is a singleton, rather than having twin units — there are strong economies of scale for twin plants that share repair and operating resources.



**Robert McCullough**

Robert McCullough is a Portland economist active in energy issues across the U.S. and Canada. He is best known for advising public power agencies in their case against Enron in the aftermath of the California energy crisis.

However, even more efficient, better-located nuclear plants are closing across the U.S. — recent announcements indicate plants closing in Illinois, New York, California, Massachusetts, and Nebraska. These plants are not closing because they are ailing. They are closing because the costs of aging nuclear is simply much higher than cleaner and simpler technologies.

The Nebraska closure is a case in point. Last week, the Omaha Public Power District, a public power entity comparable to Energy Northwest, announced the closure of the Fort Calhoun Nuclear Station on economic grounds. This was a thoughtful, well-considered opinion that weighed the costs over the rhetoric.

At the top of this piece, I indicated that Moss' Op-Ed had some amusement value. Energy Northwest several years ago purchased a multiyear supply of the dirtiest, most

expensive and most carbon-intensive nuclear fuel in the world. The fuel is from the now closed, bankrupt and decaying facility in Paducah, Ky., which was one of the largest emitters of chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) — hundreds of times more harmful than carbon — and was powered by two very dirty coal stations.

This is a case of selective accounting by Energy Northwest — the plant emits no carbon using the nuclear fuel, but emits a great deal by using carbon-intensive fuel.

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The bottom line is that we can afford a much better mix of resources — at lower cost — than this aging nuclear station. As the Omaha Public Power District put it, it is time to rebalance our generating portfolio for a less expensive and less risky future.

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