

## Former EPA leader: 'Irresponsible' for US to halt nuclear power

By [Laura Barron-Lopez](#) - 10/24/14 01:17 PM EDT

Former Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) chief Carol Browner said it would be “irresponsible” for the U.S. to take nuclear power off the table if it is serious about tackling climate change.

Speaking at a Washington event hosted by *The Hill* and Nuclear Matters, Browner called herself a “lifelong environmentalist” who now supports nuclear energy.

Browner, who led the EPA under President Clinton, also worked on climate and energy policy for President Obama during his first years in office and explained her shift on nuclear policy on Friday.

“I think climate change is the biggest problem the world has ever faced,” Browner said.

“Here in the U.S., if we were to take off the table an existing source of carbon-free energy, it would simply be irresponsible,” she said.

If you had asked her thoughts 20 years ago, Browner said, she would “probably not be pro-nuclear.”

“In the course of thinking about it, I realized it wasn’t a responsible decision given my belief about climate change,” she said.

Not all environmentalists would agree with her. A number of prominent green groups don’t push nuclear as an energy solution, despite its carbon-free output, due to other dangers like radiation and proliferation.

But Browner stressed that “today’s most pressing problem is climate change, and so it’s time to rethink your position.”

Browner, who now works with Nuclear Matters, turned to Germany as a lesson for the U.S.

“Germany made a decision to bow out of nuclear ... we now see the results,” Browner said. “What we see is, yes, renewables have grown, but we also see a growth in the amount of coal production.”

Browner argues that if the U.S. loses its baseload of nuclear energy, which currently provides 60 percent of the country’s carbon-free power, then it would be “very difficult” to meet the new targets set by EPA on carbon pollution.

“Germany is a very important lesson in that if we were to make that decision not to maintain our existing nuclear, what you might get — certainly in the short term — what we saw is basically more carbon,” Browner said.

The administration has said the EPA’s new rules on carbon pollution from power plants should help boost nuclear, but the industry remains skeptical as the proposal doesn’t count plants that are currently under construction, making it difficult for states to meet targets.

That, added to nuclear’s fight to remain competitive in a market that favors inexpensive natural gas, makes the future of the energy source less than certain.

Still, Browner and the administration have said nuclear is critical to reaching the president’s goal of fewer emissions to fight climate change.