

From Policy to Power: Utah's Nuclear Energy Agenda

2026 Legislative Session Summary on Nuclear Energy Policy

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Background

Utah has emerged as one of the most active states in the nation in pursuing advanced nuclear energy. Driven by Governor Cox's Operation Gigawatt initiative, the Legislature has moved aggressively to build the policy, regulatory, and industrial infrastructure needed to meet growing energy demands. Nuclear energy, particularly Small Modular Reactors (SMRs), has become central to that strategy given its potential to provide stable, clean baseload power at a scale renewables and traditional fossil fuels alone may not meet.

In 2025, Utah took major steps to promote nuclear energy through both legislation and formal industry partnerships. Landmark legislation H.B. 249 established a Nuclear Energy Consortium and Utah Energy Council, alongside an energy investment fund to support strategic planning and development of nuclear projects in the state. That same year, Utah's Department of Environmental Quality formally petitioned the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) to expand the state's authority under the Atomic Energy Act. The state also formalized a series of industry partnerships covering the full nuclear lifecycle, from workforce development to energy storage and deployment.

Alongside in-state initiatives, Utah strengthened regional agreements. A tri-state memorandum signed by the Governors of Utah, Idaho, and Wyoming established a collaborative framework for advanced nuclear energy development, with the shared goal of building an energy corridor across the Mountain West. A parallel partnership with Idaho National Laboratory aligns Utah with the nation's leading nuclear energy research institution. With these foundations in place, Utah has moved from planning to action.

2026 Legislative Session

In 2026, the Utah Legislature took deliberate steps to deepen the state's commitment to nuclear energy development. The following bills delivered the next round of tools needed to support Utah's energy strategy.

H.C.R. 1 - House Concurrent Resolution Regarding Advanced Nuclear Manufacturing

H.C.R. 1 sent a clear message to the nuclear industry: Utah is open for business. The resolution formally declared state support for developing an advanced nuclear manufacturing industry within Utah's borders, signaling that the state is not simply interested in hosting a reactor, but in becoming a place where the components, systems, and technology that power nuclear facilities are actually built. For companies evaluating where to invest or establish supply chain operations, the resolution signals that Utah is actively courting the nuclear manufacturing sector.

S.B. 135 - Nuclear Reprocessing Amendments

S.B. 135 recognizes nuclear fuel recycling as a potential clean energy opportunity and authorizes the Office of Energy Development to coordinate with public, private, and federal partners to study and plan for the possible development of a nuclear fuel recycling facility in Utah. The bill established a Nuclear Lifecycle Innovation Campus covering activities across the nuclear fuel chain, but does not authorize construction or commit funding to a specific facility.

H.B. 514 - Utah Energy Council Amendments

H.B. 514 established the Utah Energy Infrastructure District, a new office designed to give the state a dedicated financing tool to fund large-scale energy projects through revenue bonds. The bill addresses potential private investment gaps for capital intensive projects like SMRs.

H.B. 78 - Nuclear Regulatory Amendments

H.B. 78 established a Nuclear Energy Regulatory Office under the Division of Waste Management and Radiation Control. The office is responsible for coordinating with the Nuclear Regulatory Commission on licensing, compliance, and oversight of nuclear materials and activities within the state. This reflects a broader legislative effort to build in-state regulatory capacity as Utah pursues Agreement State status. Agreement State is a formal federal designation that allows a state to assume direct regulatory authority over certain nuclear materials rather than deferring entirely to the NRC. Currently 39 states hold this designation, and Utah is actively working to obtain this status.

Legislative Impact

The legislation passed this session moves Utah from planning to action across three areas: regulatory authority, industry development, and workforce development.

1

Regulatory Authority

The establishment of a Nuclear Energy Regulatory Office under H.B. 78 represents a meaningful shift in how Utah will engage with the NRC. For nuclear developers and investors evaluating Utah as a project site, the presence of a functioning state regulatory office signals institutional readiness. It reduces the uncertainty that comes with depending entirely on a federal agency managing a national workload, and it gives companies a direct point of contact within state government. Over time, as the office builds expertise and the Agreement State petition advances, Utah's regulatory environment could become one of its competitive advantages in attracting the next generation of nuclear investment.

2

Industry Development

S.B. 135 opens the door to a domestic nuclear fuel recycling facility in Utah, a development that could have long-term implications for the state's role in the national nuclear supply chain. If realized, Utah would move beyond deployment to play a more integrated role in the nuclear fuel cycle. The concurrent resolutions affirming support for in-state nuclear manufacturing further signal that the Legislature views nuclear not just as an energy source, but as an economic opportunity.

3

Workforce Development

The convergence of new regulatory infrastructure, planned SMR deployment, and potential fuel recycling operations creates significant workforce demand in a field where trained professionals are scarce nationally. Utah's partnership with Holtec International to establish a permanent training facility by 2028 is a direct response to that need, positioning the state to develop homegrown talent ahead of the industry's growth curve.

What's Next

Utah's legislative momentum is already translating into building on the ground. The Utah San Rafael Energy Lab (USREL) in Emery County is emerging as the state's premier testing ground for advanced nuclear technologies.

Valar Atomics broke ground on the Ward 250 test reactor at USREL in late 2025, becoming the second company in the Department of Energy's Nuclear Reactor Pilot Program to begin construction. The reactor integrates TRISO fuel and heat pipe technology designed to enhance safety and reliability. Valar Atomics is targeting the reactor to go live before July 4, 2026, which would make it one of the first operational advanced test reactors in the country.

USREL has also signed an MOU with NuCube Energy to place one of its microreactors at the facility. NuCube's technology is designed to operate independently from existing power grids, making it particularly relevant for rural Utah communities that have historically faced higher energy costs and limited access to reliable power infrastructure.

These projects reflect a deliberate strategy. Rather than concentrating on a single technology, Utah is building a research environment where multiple reactor concepts can be tested, validated, and advanced toward commercialization. With the creation of the Nuclear Energy Regulatory Office and S.B. 135 enabling domestic fuel recycling, the state is establishing itself as a central player in the development and deployment of frontier nuclear technologies.

That positioning carries significant economic weight. As Utah works to become an energy exporter, it stands to attract industry, stabilize costs for residents, and draw outside investment. With U.S. electricity demand expected to grow by 25 percent by 2030, the states that can reliably produce and supply clean power will be well placed to benefit. Utah intends to be one of them.

Announcement of Operation Gigawatt

Gov. Cox announces Utah's plan to double power production over the next 10 years

2026 Legislative Session & Valor Goes Live

Utah targets Valor's Ward 250 reactor live by July 4th, advancing Operation Gigawatt through HB 78 (Nuclear Regulatory Office), HB 249 (Nuclear Energy Consortium and investment fund), HCR 1 (open for nuclear manufacturing), and SB 135 (nuclear fuel recycling).

2024

2025

2026

BEYOND

Utah Petitions NRC & Valor Breaks Ground

Utah's DEQ petitions the NRC to expand state authority under the Atomic Energy Act, as Valor Atomics breaks ground on the Ward 250 test reactor at USREL in Emery County.

Nuclear Workforce & Energy Export

Utah establishes a Holtec nuclear training facility and advances SMR deployment to meet rising national energy demand.

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