



Canada Eyes the Enrichment Club

Posted By [Keith Johnson](#) On March 7, 2008 @ 10:11 am In [Oil Sands](#), [Nuclear](#) | [1 Comment](#)

Neil King reports from Washington, D.C.:

Today only a dozen countries are known to have facilities to enrich uranium. Seven have nuclear weapons: the U.S., the U.K., France, China, Russia, India and Pakistan. The other five—Germany, Japan, Argentina, Brazil and the Netherlands—don't.



Saskatchewan
Premier Brad
Wall

Now Canada may seek to join the club. And no one wants that more than the massive province of Saskatchewan, which alone [produces a quarter of the world's uranium](#).

"We are the Saudi Arabia of uranium," says Brad Wall, Saskatchewan's newly elected premier, who is visiting Washington to lobby the Energy Department and Congress to get U.S. approval for an enrichment program. A spokesman for the Canadian embassy said that "it is in our mutual interest for Canada to become a reliable supplier of uranium fuel to the US."

Canada clamoring to enter the enrichment club could cause a big fuss, especially as the U.S. and other powers are now cracking down on Iran for moving ahead on its own enrichment program.

"This is a big problem if the Bush administration decides to say to the Canadians, 'You're different. You're not Iranians,'" says Daryl Kimball, executive director of the Washington-based [Arms Control Association](#).

U.S. officials declined to comment on the Canadian push. Mr. Ward is meeting with Energy Secretary Samuel Bodman on Friday. But the effort is already raising some alarm on Capitol Hill, where staffers say that President Bush may smile on the Canadian bid.

If so, that would undercut existing White House policy. President Bush in February 2004 said that [no new countries should be allowed to join the enrichment club](#). Later that year he got the Group of Eight top industrialized countries, of which Canada is a member, [to agree to a ban](#) on supplying enrichment technology to any country seeking to join the club. That ban has since been renewed every year by the G8.

Mr. Wall says that Canada, at the next G8 meeting in Japan, will push the group to drop the ban. Australia, Brazil and South Africa also want to jump into enrichment. But Mr. Wall says he isn't assured of U.S. support. "They are not excited about expanding the list," he says of the Bush administration.

Mr. Wall says it makes perfect sense for Canada—and particularly his vast province—to move up the value chain. "We have never added any value to even one ounce of uranium," he says. If it is ethical to export uranium for others to refine and enrich, he says, "then it is ethical for us to refine and enrich it."

But his vision goes even further. Mr. Wall would also like to build a small nuclear power plant in Saskatchewan, not only to export power to the U.S. and elsewhere in Canada, but also to power the [region's oil-sands industry](#), which devours huge amounts of electricity.

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