

Don't sell nuke reactors: Poll

Ontarians favour putting more funds into Chalk River



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Ontarians don't want Ottawa's troubled Chalk River nuclear reactors sold to private interests, an exclusive Nanos Research-Sun Media poll has found.

As reported by Sun Media last month, the federal government spent \$600 million building a pair of replacement nuclear reactors at Chalk River that are 17 years overdue, 400% over budget and may never be operational.

Ottawa is now struggling over what to do with its white elephants.

Pollster Nik Nanos said just over one in 10 people (13%) believe Ottawa should close the reactors and not sell them to a third party.

On the other side, 18% of those polled supported selling the reactors outright to the private sector.

"But both of those options are not really acceptable to a majority of Ontarians," Nanos said. "What the poll shows is there's more likely to be appetite for putting funds into Chalk River than selling off or closing the reactors."

Chalk River's aging reactor was producing more than 50% of the world's isotopes when it was shut down last fall by the nuclear watchdog for safety reasons and only re-opened through an emergency government bill.

Mike Burns, former chairman of Atomic Energy of Canada, which operates Chalk River, said it may be time for the government to get out of the nuclear business, and put the private sector in the driver's seat.

Nanos said a significant number of people polled -- 23.6% -- would favour investing still more government money in the reactors. "I think the best way to describe it is in for a penny, in for a pound."

The largest percentage, 28.5%, would like to see a private-public partnership at Chalk River.

Ontarians know that government resources can be stretched only so far and appears open to more flexible funding models involving the private sector, Nanos said.

Any future for Chalk River would have to include a strong public oversight

role, he said.

Only 17% of those polled were "unsure" about what should be done with Chalk River, he said.

The Nanos Research poll found men and women of all age groups were strong supporters of a public-private partnership at Chalk River.

Those aged 40 to 49 years old were most likely to favour more government money for the reactors. Young Ontarians were the least likely to support selling the reactors to the private sector.

Nanos Research polled 500 Ontario residents Feb. 5 to 8.