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SUMMARIZATION OF: The Risky Movement to Make America Nuclear Again

Bloomberg Article, Posted October 30, 2025 by Michael Riley

SUMMARY

Silicon Valley investors, tech giants, and political allies are pushing to accelerate a new wave of “advanced” nuclear reactors, even as some companies—like Oklo—face major safety and licensing failures at the NRC. The article highlights a growing effort to weaken federal oversight in hopes of fast-tracking experimental reactors that have never been successfully deployed in the U.S.

The movement to revive nuclear power in the United States is increasingly shaped by Oklo, a Silicon Valley startup founded by Jake and Caroline DeWitte. The couple’s goal was to build compact nuclear reactors capable of powering remote communities, industrial sites and eventually enormous artificial intelligence data centers. In 2020, Oklo applied to the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission for permission to operate its first reactor, but the agency rejected the application after two years, saying the company failed to provide basic verifiable safety information. A former senior agency official described Oklo as the “worst applicant the NRC has ever had.” The DeWittes responded with anger and accused the agency of acting incompetently and with hostility.

Despite the rejection, Oklo’s fortunes improved in the shifting political landscape. The company went public and rose to a market value of about \$20 billion. Jake DeWitte appeared beside President Donald Trump as he signed orders promoting what he called a new nuclear renaissance. Oklo’s backers always had an alternative plan in case traditional licensing failed. Influential investors including venture capitalist Salen Churi, who has ties to the Koch network, advocated a strategy borrowed from companies such as Uber: pressure the regulator, challenge its authority and find political openings to reshape the rules. The NRC lost significant staff, and efforts to strip its powers advanced. Alongside these political shifts, major technology companies such as Amazon, Google, Meta and Microsoft backed a new generation of small, advanced reactors, even though none had yet been built in the United States.

Oklo was not the most technically advanced of the new nuclear firms. TerraPower and Kairos Power had deeper experience and more success navigating the licensing process. But Oklo had powerful allies, including Sam Altman, co-founder of OpenAI that produced ChatGPT. The

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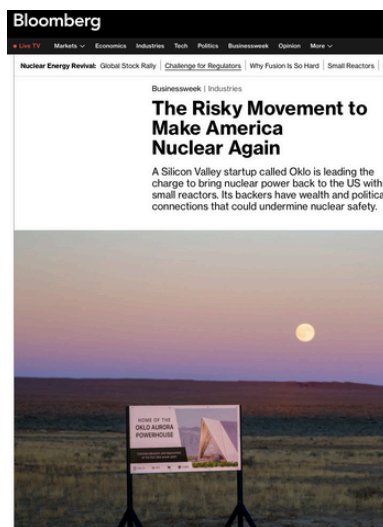


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company also benefited from the growing belief in Silicon Valley that nuclear energy could become a disruptive breakthrough, so long as reactors could be smaller, cheaper and faster to deploy than traditional plants. This enthusiasm followed the collapse of another highly publicized nuclear startup, Transatomic Power, which had made bold technical claims that later proved riddled with errors. That failure cast doubt on the mix of venture capital culture and nuclear engineering, but investors continue to search for the next promising effort.

At the Idaho National Laboratory, Oklo plans to build its Aurora reactor, inspired by the historic Experimental Breeder Reactor II, a sodium-cooled fast reactor admired by some for its apparent passive safety. Critics argue that sodium cooled fast reactors are difficult to operate and prone to higher rates of failure than standard light-water reactors.

As the Department of Energy pushes for several advanced reactors to be operating by July of 2026, critics caution against dismantling hard learned safeguards. One federal lawsuit aims to streamline the nuclear rule-making process with the goal of exempting some small nuclear reactors from traditional NRC oversight and handing it to state-centered agencies instead. Only time will tell if ambitious startups, political pressure and enthusiasm from technology investors will jumpstart a revolutionary industry or cause safety and environmental lapses that will dampen this excitement.



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