
For 80 years, Canada has been a leader in the responsible development of nuclear energy: Whitlock

Re: “Don’t sing praises of enriched uranium: letter writer,” (*The Hill Times*, Aug. 4). I believe the letter writer is conflating high-enriched uranium with enriched uranium in general. Canada has indeed moved on from using high-enriched uranium in peaceful applications like medical isotope production and research, but we most definitely still use enriched uranium at lower levels that are below the International Atomic Energy Agency threshold of direct weapons-usability.

The letter writer singles out the Canadian-designed SLOWPOKE research reactor, which ran on high-enriched uranium fuel like hundreds of other research reactors built in the latter half of the 20th century, but importantly it utilized a fraction of the high-enriched uranium of the American designs. This was part of an innovative Canadian effort to minimize the use of this material in an era when it’s application in civilian research reactors was commonplace.

With the shutdown of the reactors at Chalk River Laboratories, Canada now imports its main nuclear medical isotope, Tc-99m, from foreign reactors that run on enriched uranium. Tc-99m is responsible for more than 80 per cent of procedures worldwide.

A recent innovation in Canada will enable the CANDU reactors at Darlington, Ont., to produce this crucial radioisotope without the use of enriched uranium. However, this will account for only a fraction of the potential of enrichment uranium to meet the world’s needs.

For 80 years, Canada has been a leader in the responsible development of nuclear energy and its many applications, including the use of enriched uranium and the revolutionary medical tools that it enabled.

Dr. Jeremy J. Whitlock
Stratford, Ont.

(The letter writer is a nuclear consultant and former senior technical adviser at the IAEA Department of Safeguards)