

Ridge Opposes Federal Nuke Guards

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) - Homeland Security Director Tom Ridge said Sunday that private security forces at nuclear power plants should not be replaced with federal guards, siding with federal regulators and the industry.

The federal role in guarding the nation's 103 nuclear reactors against terrorist attacks should be limited to setting standards about the level of security provided, Ridge said on NBC's ``Meet the Press."

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission already certifies security plans at each plant, and tightened requirements after Sept. 11.

``There is a role here for the federal government," Ridge said. But, he added, ``those who own the nuclear power plants have to provide" the security.

Legislation to federalize plant security guards was introduced by Democratic Sens. Harry Reid of Nevada, Joe Lieberman of Connecticut and Hillary Rodham Clinton of New York and independent Sen. James Jeffords of Vermont.

Reid, chairman of the Senate subcommittee with authority over the NRC, said Friday he plans to continue to push the legislation.

But NRC Chairman Richard Meserve has said that regulators oppose such a move. The nuclear industry does, too, preferring greater authority for guards instead.

Nuclear reactor guards currently are armed, but many states restrict what weapons they may carry and whether they may use deadly force.

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