

New Prime Minister Shinzo Abe Takes Office, Appoints Cabinet

On September 26, Shinzo Abe, the recently selected leader of Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), was elected by a majority of both houses of the Japanese Diet to become Japan's 90th prime minister. That afternoon, the new Abe Cabinet was launched. The cabinet posts with relevance to nuclear policy were filled with the following LDP legislators: Akira Amari as the head of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI), Bunmei Ibuki as the head of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), and Sanae Takaichi as the State Minister for Science and Technology Policy.



METI Minister Amari at the press conference

and turns in Japan's nuclear policy so far, and some politicians in the LDP formerly opposed the policy of reprocessing because of cost constraints. However, I kept on making the point that reprocessing would yield benefits in the long run; with uranium prices recently jumping sevenfold in a short period, the argument for the necessity of reprocessing has become that much more persuasive." Also, he said, "While it is important to assure the stability of fossil fuels, it is also important to retain some bargaining power as a means of negotiation. Therefore, it is important to pursue nuclear power – a quasi-domestic form of energy – while gaining both its safety and reliability."

On the same day, Minister Amari held his first press conference at METI headquarters, and expressed his hopes for his new position in this way: "My life work has been economic and industrial policy, and I am deeply honored and grateful for my appointment. Given the importance of strategies for economic growth, I hope that I can help improve productivity through innovation."

Also, Amari openly avowed that "it is important to give nuclear power a solid position" in national energy policy. He went on to say, "I have always believed in the future of nuclear power when I promoted it, and having been in positions of responsibility, I have pursued my task believing that it will definitely come to see the light of day despite the severe circumstances." In addition, he explained, "Japan is the only non-nuclear weapons state for which [nuclear fuel] reprocessing is recognized. There have been many twists



MEXT Minister Ibuki at the press conference

After the first meeting of the new Abe Cabinet, MEXT Minister Bunmei Ibuki visited his ministry's main offices and gave his first press conference as well. Expressing his hope that his administration of the Ministry would concentrate primarily on developing human resources who would go on to support society, Ibuki advocated the early passage of the Basic Education Law, for example. When asked by the reporters to give specific policy details, he revealed his idea of promoting policies that would help realize what Prime Minister Abe calls the "creation of a beautiful country." He said he would carry that out from the perspective of fostering human resources and encouraging innovation, and not "creating a Buddha image while forgetting to put in the soul" (i.e., trying hard to accomplish something and getting very near to the state of completion, but forgetting to do the most important thing, thereby leaving it incomplete).

Meanwhile, Sanae Takaichi, a Lower House LDP politician, was given her first Cabinet

posting, as a state minister under the Cabinet Office. She was assigned the broad-ranging portfolios of science and technology, Okinawa and the Northern Territories (north of Hokkaido), innovation, food safety, declining birthrate measures and gender equality.

In her first press conference as cabinet minister, Takaichi alluded to the wide variety of the areas for which she was made responsible, and expressed her hopes about science, technology and innovation in this way: "I would like to foster those things that will lead to greater competitiveness, as that is the source of sustainable economic growth. I would also like to utilize a well-balanced blend of both selection and concentration."

As far as nuclear policies are concerned, she said, "I would like to promote the nuclear fuel cycle in a steady fashion, based on the Fundamental Principles for the Nuclear Policy Program, while always making safety the top priority."



Minister Takaichi

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