

Misplaced Priorities

For the past six years, I have served on the Vermont House of Representatives' Natural Resources and Energy committee. I have heard hundreds of hours of testimony on the Vermont Yankee nuclear power plant in Vernon on topics including power uprate, taxation, climate change, dry cask storage of nuclear waste, and security against terrorist threats. I also have helped craft a number of laws affecting VY.

In 2006, the legislature passed a law requiring approval by both the House and Senate before the Vermont Public Service Board can issue a "Certificate of Public Good" for renewal of VY's license beyond March 2012. This allows the legislature to shut down Vermont Yankee and is expected to take place during the 2009 session.

This year, the legislature passed another law that authorized experts from the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, the Vermont Department of Public Service and specialized independent contractors to perform a detailed technical evaluation called a "comprehensive vertical audit" (CVA) of the reliability of Vermont Yankee going forward.

The CVA bill also created a "public oversight panel" of three citizens knowledgeable about nuclear plant operations to oversee the audit and provide a report to the legislature by January, 2009 to help guide the vote to approve or deny the plant's license renewal past 2012.

With VY, Vermont currently has the lowest electricity prices in New England and the smallest CO2 footprint in the US. The decision on relicensing Vermont Yankee will have profound consequences for Vermont's energy future, and the independence, fairness and objectivity of the CVA oversight panel is crucial to getting the facts.

After much debate, the Natural Resources Committee arrived at a consensus: one panel member to be appointed by Governor Douglas, one by Senate President Pro Tem Peter Shumlin, and the third by House Speaker Gaye Symington.

Governor Douglas has appointed Dr. Lawrence Hochreiter from the Department of Mechanical and Nuclear Engineering, Pennsylvania State University. His education and work experience in the field of nuclear engineering and his lack of any connection to Vermont Yankee satisfies me that he will be objective in his evaluation of the audit.

Speaker Symington picked former NRC commissioner Peter Bradford who has experience in nuclear regulation, but none in nuclear operations, and has made a number of publicly-reported statements that indicate a bias against nuclear power. While Mr. Bradford is entitled to his opinions, he cannot be said to be objective.

Senator Shumlin has named Arnie Gundersen, a committed anti-nuclear activist to the oversight panel. By placing Mr. Gundersen on the oversight panel, Senator Shumlin has continued his own agenda to prevent Vermont Yankee's relicensing and destroyed the integrity of the whole Comprehensive Vertical Audit process.

Mr. Gundersen actively opposed the sale of Vermont Yankee to Entergy before the Vermont Public Service Board in 2002, served as a paid "expert" at the PSB against the 20% VY power uprate in 2003, and has opposed the current NRC docket on Vermont Yankee's license renewal application. He has also testified a number of times against Vermont Yankee in the Vermont Legislature and before the Vermont State Nuclear Advisory Panel.

In 2006, Mr. Gundersen authored an anti-VY op-ed in the Burlington Free Press stating that "Nuclear power is neither

safe nor cheap,” and stated “I would rather see windmills on ridgelines and solar panels reflecting across all Vermont roofs than risk the environmental purity of our state to the silent menace of radioactive contamination.”

By failing to disclose Mr. Gundersen’s obvious conflicts of interest, Sen. Shumlin also has failed to be honest with the citizens of Vermont, and has denied us a full and thorough investigation of the reliability of Vermont Yankee.

It is ridiculous to allow the legislative leadership to allow a politically-motivated sideshow by the anti-nuclear lobby to replace a reasoned debate on our options for our electric supply going forward.

Vermonters deserve better.

Sincerely,

Representative Joseph L. Krawczyk Jr.

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