

Let's stick to facts on VY

By STEVE DARROW

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Letters to the Editor on both sides of the debate on the future of Vermont Yankee have been straying from the underlying facts.

A Mr. Rowell asked: "Just where do the opponents of the continued operation of Yankee expect to get the electricity to replace that now being produced?"

This is brought up by both sides and reflects a misunderstanding of electric markets. The electric system in Vermont is part of a much larger regional market and transmission grid run by Independent System Operator New England. They are a creation of the federal government. Their website says they are "a non-profit corporation that (1) operates the regional bulk power generation and transmission system, (2) administers New England's wholesale electricity marketplace, and (3) plans for the region's electric future." Within this regional system there are around 300 electric generating plants. No single generating plant produces more than a small part of the total power. Plants are regularly shut down for various reasons. New plants are built.

If Vermont Yankee and the sliver of power it produces disappeared overnight, the rest of the system would take over seamlessly. Just like when the plant shuts down in an emergency or to refuel.

Whenever Vermont Yankee closes for good, the companies who have power contracts with it will line up contracts with other generators in the system. If we got serious about energy efficiency, the companies wouldn't need much replacement power.

Technology and transportation have created larger geographic markets for energy, food and consumer goods. State boundaries are largely irrelevant. Electricity is no exception. It would be great if all the electricity we use was "Made in Vermont." It would also be great if all the gas and diesel we use was "Made in Vermont." It would be even better if it was all "green." It is not going to happen in the foreseeable future, and not without new technologies. Rowell also notes the opposition to other energy projects. Yes, in settled communities with traditional land use patterns and values there is opposition to change. It ranges from outright nimbyism, to legitimate concerns about pollution, development, and corporate responsibility.

Most of the opposition to the proposal to put a natural gas pipeline through this area arose over the company's use of eminent domain to take private property while refusing to show property owners a right of way document. This type of opposition is found worldwide, at least in countries that have any semblance of freedom left. It's more an indicator of freedom than a problem. Be thankful we still have that freedom left.

Thankfully, many people are exercising their freedoms in opposing Vermont Yankee. Unfortunately they have not grasped the end game set up by Act 160, and the moving

pieces and issues in play. Remember, Entergy did not oppose Act 160 and it specifically declined to say on the legislative record that it would accept the state's authority on relicensing. No license approval by the Legislature does not mean shutdown. Shutdown does not mean decommissioning. Decommissioning does not mean removal of the nuclear waste. Green fielding is a fantasy. That's for another article.

The lack of surety on Yankee's license extension has caused maintenance and upgrading at the plant to be delayed. The old car analogy is perfect. Why spend money fixing up a car you won't be driving?

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