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Subject: FW: Proposed nuclear decommissioning bill
Date: September 21, 2020 at 10:51:57 AM EDT
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<https://www.reformer.com/stories/proposed-nuclear-decommissioning-bill-carries-big-bonus-for-vernon,614000>

Proposed nuclear decommissioning bill carries big bonus for

Vernon

Posted Sunday, September 20, 2020 8:39 pm

By Susan Smallheer, Brattleboro Reformer

VERNON — A bill introduced in Congress by Vermont's three-man Congressional delegation concerning the decommissioning of nuclear power plants would provide a stunning financial windfall for the town of Vernon — up to \$18 million a year.

The bill, the Nuclear Decommissioning Act of 2020, is co-sponsored by Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., and Rep. Peter F. Welch, D-Vt., as well as several additional co-sponsors, including Sen. Edward Markey, D-Mass., Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., Sen. Kirsten Gillebrand, D-N.Y., and Sen. Tammy Duckworth, D-Ill..

Rep. Peter Welch, D-Vt., included the "stand alone" provision for the town of Vernon, so it would receive an annual fee based on the

tonnage of high-level nuclear waste now stored in the town, according to a spokesman.

Currently, NorthStar Vermont Yankee LLC stores 1.2 million kilograms of high-level radioactive spent nuclear fuel at the Vernon site, in a special storage facility built several years ago north of the reactor building. The bill calls for a payment of \$15 per kilogram, for up to \$18.5 million. The federal Department of Energy was supposed to build a national depository for spent nuclear fuel, but so far plans for such a facility at Yucca Mountain Nevada has failed to make much progress.

Sanders and Welch have introduced similar legislation since 2014, and in 2018, a portion of the bill was attached to a larger bill that required the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to hold hearings in 10 host nuclear communities.

The bill provides two major benefits for the current decommissioning process at Vermont Yankee. It would provide \$500,000 to the Community Advisory Board so that it can

better perform its work; and it would provide \$15 dollars per kilogram of waste being stored in Vernon each year, according to Lincoln Peek, spokesman for Welch.

The bill, which gives host communities and states "greater control over reactor shut down plans," wouldn't have much effect on the decommissioning at Vermont Yankee, since its plans have already been approved and are in use.

"The closure of Vermont Yankee has shown us how much local communities have at stake, in both the short and long term, when a plant shuts down, and also the great value that local leaders and citizens can offer at every step of the decommissioning process. This legislation brings the benefits of those lessons to provide host communities across the United States a seat at the table," said Leahy in a prepared statement.

"Communities experiencing the safety and economic impacts of nuclear plant decommissioning deserve dedicated economic

relief and a role in shaping those decommissioning plans for nuclear reactors near them, especially in light of the coronavirus and climate change crises," said Sanders, also in a release. Sanders has introduced similar legislation since 2014.

"This input is especially critical given the potential for non-operational plants to sit for decades before removal and decontamination," Sanders said. "The Nuclear Plant Decommissioning Act of 2020 would transform a process that is weighted almost entirely toward the power plant licensees into one that strikes a reasonable balance between licensees and the impacted communities."

"Vermonters know first-hand that decommissioning a nuclear power plant has enormous economic and environmental impacts on states and neighboring communities," said Welch, who has so-sponsored similar legislation with Sanders since 2014. "It is essential that state and local leaders have a seat at the table throughout the decommissioning process. This commonsense

legislation ensures the decommissioning process is transparent, inclusive and collaborative."The measure would also create several new grant programs to foster communication and information exchange between licensees and communities impacted by plant decommissioning and stranded nuclear waste, and to provide economic assistance to impacted communities.

It is co-sponsored in the Senate by Sen. Tammy Duckworth (D-Ill.), Sen. Edward Markey (D-Mass.), Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-N.Y.), Sen. Richard Durbin (D-Ill.), Sen. Angus King (I-Maine) and Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.), and Rep. Eliot Engel (D-N.Y.) in the U.S. House.

ARTICLE CONTINUES AFTER THESE ADS

Under the bill, if a host state supports the proposed plan or license transfer, the licensee can secure expedited NRC approval. Otherwise, the NRC must consider amending the proposed plan based on the host state's recommendations.

The bill would give affected states an opportunity to weigh in on the new shutdown plan if there is a license transfer or other significant change to the decommissioning plan. The legislation would require licensees to consult with the host state as well as state governments within 50 miles of the plant when drafting a proposed decommissioning plan, as well as require the NRC to solicit public input on the proposed decommissioning plan, according to the bill.

The NRC would have to evaluate and formally adopt or reject the input of the affected states.

The biggest financial benefit is the Welch proposal that would help Vernon. Vermont Yankee's fuel was transferred to the dry-cask storage facility after the plant shut down. The spent nuclear fuel is held in air-cooled containers made of concrete and steel, and it includes all the nuclear fuel that was ever used at the reactor, which started operation in 1968.

Vermont Yankee shut down in December 2014, after its then-owner, Entergy Nuclear,

said the small nuclear plant was not economical in the new energy world of fracked natural gas.

The 2020 bill is a further development of a 2018 bill sponsored by Sanders, which was designed to have federal regulators, including the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, pay more attention to local communities' concerns when approving decommissioning plans.

The bill forced the NRC to visit 10 different communities throughout the United States — including Brattleboro — that were or will be affected by plant shut downs.

NorthStar, which bought Vermont Yankee in January 2019, had very different plans for decommissioning Vermont Yankee than Entergy, which had owned Yankee for close to 17 years. Entergy was going to put the plant and reactor into cold storage for decades, while NorthStar immediately started demolition and cleanup.

NorthStar spokesman Anthony Iarapino, a Montpelier attorney, declined to comment on

the proposed legislation, which was introduced in Congress last week.

Chris Parker, chairman of the Vernon Select Board, couldn't be reached for comment Sunday.

The bill would also provide \$500,000 in funding for state decommissioning citizen advisory panels, such as the Vermont Nuclear Decommissioning Advisory Panel, which would answer longtime complaints from the Vermont Department of Public Service, and members of the nuclear panel, who said they didn't have the resources to hire experts to adequately review Vermont Yankee's decommissioning plans.

Earlier this year, the state won an endorsement from NorthStar that it would start contributing to the expenses of the citizen panel, including the time worked by state officials.

Contact Susan Smallheer at ssmallheer@reformer.com.

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