

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4502

December 29, 2015

Ms. Kate O'Connor
Chair
Vermont Nuclear Decommissioning Citizens
Advisory Panel
PO Box 6206
Brattleboro, Vermont 05302-6206

Dear Ms. O'Connor:

Thank you for writing to me about spent nuclear fuel storage. I appreciate hearing from you on this important issue.

The most urgent priority in storing spent nuclear fuel at Vermont Yankee is to empty the cooling pools and transfer the material to dry cask storage on site. I was pleased to hear that Entergy announced that they may begin to move the fuel into dry cask storage as early as 2017; two years earlier than previously planned. However, I object to Entergy's plans to reduce the Emergency Protection Zone around the plant in the meanwhile.

I agree with you that having nuclear waste wait indefinitely at Vermont Yankee on the banks of the Connecticut River and at countless other power plants across the country is unacceptable. The continued failure of the federal government to remove spent nuclear fuel under its statutory obligation created by the Nuclear Waste Policy Act of 1982 means that the country, and small host communities, are facing risks that need to be addressed. Beneficial reuse of the sites of closed nuclear plants is also being delayed for decades.

Ideally, the nuclear material stored in Vernon Vermont should be permanently removed from the site as soon as possible. That is why I was disappointed that the final Fiscal Year 2016 (FY16) Omnibus Appropriations Bill that was signed into law by President Obama on December 18, 2015, did not include the Senate Energy and Water Development Appropriations Subcommittee's pilot nuclear waste storage program that had strong bipartisan support.

Although that pilot was stripped from the final appropriations bill; on December 23, 2015, the Department of Energy (DOE) published a Notice of Invitation for Public Comment on the design of a new content-based siting process for nuclear waste storage and disposal facilities to the Federal Register. You can find the invitation for public comment here: <https://federalregister.gov/a/2015-32346> and I would encourage you and the other New England community advisory groups to submit comments before the comment period closes on June 15, 2016.

The DOE also announced that it plans to host a series of public meetings to engage with communities to discuss this new approach to managing our nation's nuclear waste. Although they have not released the dates or locations for these meetings yet, I expect that the DOE will hold them in early to mid-2016, and they will serve as an opportunity for the DOE to receive input on what should be considered when designing this new siting process. As soon as more information is released about these public meetings I will be sure to have my staff reach out to you directly with any details they receive.

Safety must be a top priority in dealing with nuclear waste management. Ultimately, any decision on where to store nuclear waste must be based on sound science. The impact and position of the local community and state must also be taken into consideration. Residents who live near nuclear reactors and waste sites deserve a comprehensive national plan for the handling and storage of nuclear waste on a permanent basis.

Please know that I will continue to follow this issue closely. Thank you again for writing me and for the important work you are doing on this critical issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Patrick Leahy". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned to the right of the word "Sincerely,".

PATRICK LEAHY
United States Senator

PJL/ lg