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PLYMOUTH TOWN ELECTION: Dry cask on ballot

Would you like to “encourage” local government officials to do what they can to transfer all of the spent fuel stored in a pool in the reactor building at the Pilgrim Nuclear Power Station into dry cask storage as soon as possible?

PLYMOUTH – Would you like to “encourage” local government officials to do what they can to transfer all of the spent fuel stored in a pool in the reactor building at the Pilgrim Nuclear Power Station into dry cask storage as soon as possible?

Entergy has committed to spending more than \$150 million on a dry cask facility at Pilgrim, but the company will only transfer as much spent fuel as necessary to keep the plant operational.

At that rate the spent fuel pool will still be brimming with fuel rods when the plant’s license expires in just less than 20 years. Entergy and the NRC don’t see that as a problem, but others are convinced the pool is a more dangerous place than dry cask to store that radioactive waste.

If you would like to see things speed up, then the non-binding referendum selectmen have agreed to sponsor on the ballot at this year’s town election is your chance to say so.

Heather Lightner of the Concerned Neighbors of Pilgrim appeared before the selectmen two weeks ago, asking for their assistance in placing a referendum on the ballot, but the board was less than enthusiastic.

They support the ultimate goals of the referendum, several board members told Lightner, but some didn’t see the value of the referendum and others were unhappy with the specific wording of the question.

They particularly did not like the term “direct,” as in “Should the people of Plymouth, Massachusetts, direct town officials...” toward the goal of faster transfer of all spent fuel.

Selectman Tony Provenzano was also adamant when Lightner first approached selectmen, noting that the board should be on record as supporting the long-term goal of getting all of the spent fuel at the plant out of Plymouth and into a national repository.

So, the board offered Lightner a compromise: work on revised language and come back in a week.

Provenzano worked with the Lightner to fashion a revised ballot question and then presented that to the board at its April 1 meeting.

Apart from the removal of “direct” in favor of “encourage,” the main difference between the two versions is that the second adds a new reference to the spent fuel’s “ultimate and permanent disposition in a federally sponsored national or regional storage facility.”

With those changes in place, the board voted unanimously to place the article on the ballot of the May 10 town election.

Is this just a political exercise?

Can anything practical come out of a non-binding referendum?

Yes and yes, Lightner and other members of the Concerned Neighbors of Pilgrim say.

“Having the non-binding question placed on the ballot is a positive thing for Plymouth on several levels,” Lightner told the Old Colony this week. “It will help raise awareness regarding nuclear waste storage in Plymouth, will give residents a chance to have their voice heard in the matter and, with a ‘yes’ vote, will serve as a tool for the Board of Selectmen to advocate for the town, at both the state and federal level.”

“The fact that this article is nonbinding is a red herring,” Concerned Neighbor Norman Pierce said. “Establishing a record of public votes is how the political process works. From the appointment of commissioners to the NRC to the stopping of Yucca Flats, politics are how we are made safe or unsafe.”

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Non-binding ballot question

Should the people of the town of Plymouth encourage the town’s government to employ all means available to ensure that spent nuclear fuel generated at the Pilgrim Nuclear Power Station be placed in dry cask storage as soon as technologically feasible and consistent with the highest standards and in anticipation of such spent fuel’s ultimate and permanent disposition in a federally sponsored national or regional storage facility, all in order to protect the health, welfare, and economic interests of the town of Plymouth and its inhabitants.

<http://hull.wickedlocal.com/article/20140405/NEWS/140407690>

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