By Mary Lampert
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OF NUCLEAR INTEREST: Nuclear bills to support

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There have been five nuclear power reactor accidents in 35 years: TMI, Chernobyl and three at Fukushima. That’s one every seven years. Three of the accidents were at reactors like Entergy’s Pilgrim Nuclear Power Station in Plymouth, a design the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) recognizes is flawed. Because we can expect the unexpected, it is important to support nuclear legislation now pending at the State House. Contact your local/state officials, and comment to the appropriate legislative committee. For details, see http://www.pilgrimcoalition.org/.

1. Protect your pocketbook
Bill SD 50 requires any Massachusetts commercial nuclear reactor to pay an annual $25 million post-closure funding fee into a trust fund to the state treasurer to assure sufficient money for cleanup. Pilgrim’s decommissioning fund is inadequate. It has $725.41 million (2012), $500 million less than the $1.23 billion estimated to decommission smaller Vermont Yankee. If there is not enough money, the reactor will be mothballed up to 60 years. During that time the workforce is reduced to a skeleton, offsite emergency planning eliminated, and offsite environmental monitoring eliminated or reduced. If Entergy (a limited liability company) skips town, we are left holding the bag, along with tons of radioactive waste.

Bill SD 46 establishes a fee on spent nuclear fuel stored in pools. The fee is based on economic considerations, not safety that is pre-empted. A fee should encourage Entergy to thin the spent fuel pool, reducing the damage that could occur from a spent fuel pool fire. The Massachusetts attorney general estimated that Pilgrim is vulnerable to a spent fuel pool fire that could cause up to $488 billion dollars in damages. A 2013 NRC study found that a spent pool fire at a Pennsylvania reactor similar to Pilgrim could make an area of 9,400 square miles uninhabitable for decades and displace as many as 4.1 million people. If Entergy keeps its spent-fuel pool packed, the fee would bring millions to be divided between Plymouth, impacted towns, and the commonwealth. It’s Entergy’s choice; either way the public wins.

2. Will you get out of Dodge in time?
Four bills focus on emergency planning. The bills, and the public, recognize that in a radiological disaster the threat extends well beyond 10 miles. But currently planning only covers a 10-mile radius. An Entergy funded telephone survey found that residents 10-25 miles away would evacuate if there were a radiological disaster at Pilgrim. Unplanned evacuations lead to chaos. Bill H.1868 increases the current 10-mile Radiological Emergency Planning Zone (EPZ) to 20 miles. It includes Cape Cod, the Islands, and Cape Ann. Bill H. 2031 extends the EPZ to 50 miles. Bill H. 2167 requires the state to assess the present preparedness on Cape Cod and in Essex County and to determine the need for additional specific steps for a radiological accident at Pilgrim and Seabrook. They have no plan now. Bill H. 2020 creates a Public Education Zone for areas 10 and 35 miles from a reactor or nuclear fuel disposal site. The licensee, in coordination with the state, and at its expense, must distribute educational materials about what to expect in the event of an accident, and what plans are in place for public protection.

3. What’s blowing in the wind or leaking into our water?
Two bills expand the state’s environmental monitoring around Pilgrim, Seabrook and Vermont Yankee. Reactors release radiation daily into the air and water. The public deserves to know how much radiation is in our water, soil, food and air. Bill H. 1899 amends the current law to increase Massachusetts’ Department of Public Health’s (MDPH) assessment to licensees from a maximum $180,000 per year per facility to not less than $400,000 per facility to give the department sufficient funds to perform its testing obligations. Bill H.2030 expands MDPH’s network of radiation air monitors in communities around Pilgrim (including Cape Cod) and Seabrook (including Essex County) to detect airborne radiation in real-time. A computer server provides remote real-time access to the data by MDPH staff. Emergency pager alerts are sent to senior MDPH officials if radiation is detected above typical background levels. This is to ensure that immediate actions can be taken if necessary.

All it takes is one bad day; it is up to each of us to work to pass these bills.

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