OF NUCLEAR INTEREST: No escape from the Cape

Cape Codders urge the governor to shut down Pilgrim

By Heather M. Lightner
Wicked Local Plymouth
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This past spring, 14 towns on the Cape (Sandwich, Bourne, Falmouth, Mashpee, Yarmouth, Dennis, Brewster, Harwich, Chatham, Orleans, Eastham, Wellfleet, Truro and Provincetown) voted on a public advisory ballot question or on their town warrant, hoping to send a strong message to Gov. Deval Patrick: Close Pilgrim Nuclear Power Station for good.

Questions regarding the safety of the aging power plant have caused many to fear that public safety is in jeopardy if Pilgrim continues to be operational.

Pilgrim was relicensed in May 2012, despite the objections of Governor Patrick, Attorney General Martha Coakley, Sen. Ed Markey, U.S. Rep. Bill Keating, state Sen. Dan Wolf, state Rep. Sarah Peake and Gregory Jaczko, then chairman of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC). Many groups and individuals protested the NRC’s decision believing that the inability to provide assurance of citizen safety was a violation of the public’s trust.

In October of last year, Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) Director Kurt Schwartz spoke in Harwich and warned that the Cape and Islands are “in harm’s way” should a radiological emergency occur at Pilgrim, but that there were no evacuation plans in place for the Cape and Islands. Furthermore, Cape Codders would be “relocated” days after residents of Plymouth, within the 10-mile Emergency Planning Zone (EPZ), are evacuated. Additionally, Schwartz raised the possibility that both the Bourne and Sagamore Bridge may need to be closed for a period as long as six hours, should a radioactive plume be released from Pilgrim – a fact Cape residents were not prepared to accept.

In response to what residents felt was the inability of Entergy, the company that owns Pilgrim, to provide for public safety, a campaign focused on closing Pilgrim began. The Cape Downwinders, a Cape-based organization concerned about the impact of Pilgrim Nuclear Power Station on residents of the Cape and Islands, was instrumental in getting the ballot questions and warrant items in front of Cape residents. With no avenues in place for the state to overrule the federal government on the matter of Pilgrim, Cape voters called on Governor Patrick – as chief public safety officer – to be their voice and request the NRC uphold its mandate and close Pilgrim.

The Cape has made a clear statement to the governor. But how does it affect the future of Pilgrim and the state itself?

Legislators have taken note of what Cape residents said at the polls this past spring.

Wolf, who represents most of Barnstable County, is a passionate advocate for public safety and supports the closure of Pilgrim.

Peake has co-sponsored legislation at the State House for real-time monitoring and expansion of the plume exposure EPZ to include Cape Cod.

State representatives Randy Hunt, Brian Mannal and Cleon Turner have also been outspoken regarding Pilgrim.

Representatives from the Cape Downwinders have met with the governor’s cabinet and are in the process of scheduling a meeting with Patrick in the coming weeks. The group plans to present the official town extracts to the governor and urge him to act on behalf of the public by calling on the NRC to shut down Pilgrim.

Heather M. Lightner is a Plymouth resident, a registered nurse, and president of Concerned Neighbors of Pilgrim, a group of individuals concerned about the nuclear waste storage facility being built at the Pilgrim Nuclear Power Station in Plymouth.

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