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**Public Service Board's duty is to remain objective regarding Vermont Yankee**

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The three members of the Vermont Public Service Board are about to get more free advice than all the Boston Red Sox managers combined. That's because the best case the opponents of the Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Plant have to shut the plant down is to convince the PSB that it is no longer worthy of a Certificate of Public Good.

As state auditor, it is my duty to evaluate the performance of state government. I would be remiss if I didn't point out that state government has wasted a lot of taxpayer money trying to destroy a flawed but valuable asset.

Vermont's legislation to close the plant in 2010 was carefully worded to forbid the PSB from considering the plant's application for a Certificate of Public Good. Why? The PSB's mission is, in part, "to ensure the provision of high quality public utility services in Vermont at minimum reasonable costs, consistent with the long-term public good of the state." Then Senator Peter Shumlin and his allies were afraid the Public Service Board would make a decision based on its mission.

Vermont Yankee produces baseload electricity at about 4 cents per kilowatt hour and has offered to renew contracts at about 6 cents. Wind turbines produce it intermittently at closer to 20 cents/kwh as mandated by the Legislature. Despite some serious transgressions over the years by Entergy, the plant's owner, the PSB could not ignore the cost factor, the near zero greenhouse gas emissions, taxes paid to the state and the impact of more than 1,000 jobs. When the cost of electricity is factored into the current economic climate for other Vermont businesses, it is easy to see why VY's opponents would be worried.

Now that Vermont's defense of that law has been rejected in federal court at great expense to taxpayers, we're back to square one at the Public Service Board.

The other portion of the PSB's mission statement says: "The Board strives to achieve this mission by providing an independent, fair and efficient means of resolving public utility disputes; and by guiding the development of state utility policies and rules for public services to best serve the long-term interest of Vermont and its residents."

When it comes to independence and fairness, the PSB is under the microscope in a big way. The Green Mountain Care Board was supposed to be independent, too. But, this facade of independence was torched by Gov. Peter Shumlin when he demanded that members of the GMCB cancel plans to hire some communication help and they actually did.

PSB Chairman Jim Volz and members David Coen and John Burke have the duty to remain objective in the face of shrill, arrogant anti-nuclear zealots who could care less about the practical issues involving energy policy. Just as importantly, there is a great opportunity. This is the opening for our state's majority of pragmatic, reasonable Vermonters to insist on a practical, affordable plan for our energy future. Realistic Vermonters understand that the threat of global warming far outweighs any perceived threat to safety from nuclear power. Vermonters can demand that this source of inexpensive, virtually carbon-free baseload electricity be kept on-line to serve us rather than out-of-state utilities. They can also demand that Entergy clean up its act and run the plant properly or sell it to a firm that can. Governor Shumlin's plan to power the state with 90 percent renewable electricity by 2050 ignores the mission of "minimum reasonable cost" and the fact that renewables only produce power intermittently. Vermonters who understand this should say so before they are priced out of existence.

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