

Letter to the Editors

END THE “NUCLEAR HOSTAGE CRISES” NOW!

The “nuclear hostage crisis” is finally over. Governor Rauner and the Illinois Legislature has ordered all Illinois ratepayers to pay the \$2.35 billion ransom to Exelon Corporation over the next ten years, ostensibly to save the ~1,500 jobs at the Clinton and Quad Cities nuclear reactors. That amounts to \$1.57 million for each job “saved.” Heckuva job, Raunie!

But this threat of job loss has only been postponed not eliminated. Every operating reactor has an inevitable ending hanging over it known as its operating license termination date – the date beyond which the Nuclear Regulatory Commission says, “Game over, lights out!” That date is publicly available, and was known in advance for Clinton and Quad, and for all other Illinois reactors – meaning that every reactor community in Illinois will at some point be going through the same psychodrama that unfolded around Clinton and Quad Cities recently.

Make no mistake – the impact of Exelon’s closure threats were real, needed to be taken seriously, and would have been hugely painful to those communities. Loss of jobs, reduced tax base and reduction of public services are all very real effects experienced by the Zion community when ComEd closed those reactors in 1998, effects from which it still has not recovered, according to Mayor Al Hill.

Responsible governance calls for this never happening again. Responsible governance calls for pro-active plans to insure that workers are protected, and local tax bases are not decimated overnight by legally allowed corporate caprice. Illinois needs a “reactor exit strategy” in place BEFORE the next nuclear hostage crisis occurs.

Gov. Rauner said he supported the Exelon bailout because, “closing the plants would have devastated the two communities.” If he really and truly believes that, then he should have worked to bail out the potentially devastated communities, not the hugely profitable Exelon corporation.

For over 2 years our organization argued that the State must insist that a “just transitions” program be instituted to protect reactor (and perhaps coal) communities from the withdrawal of “company town” utilities like Exelon. Absent such a proactive plan, this “bailout tango” will be repeated in the future when Byron, LaSalle, Dresden and Braidwood start to become “unprofitable” for Exelon.

We spelled out potential funding mechanisms, which are eminently negotiable. We left copies of this plan at the offices of over 40 legislators and state officials, including Governor Rauner’s office, Rep. Madigan’s office, Sen. Cullerton’s office, the AG’s office, and numerous individual legislators including Sen. Radogno, the Clean Jobs Bill sponsors, and others. We personally gave copies to Sen. Chapin Rose who represents the Clinton community, and representatives from the Quad Cities chamber of commerce and City Administrator of Clinton. We made it part

of our testimony before the House and Senate Energy Committees. We urged that it become a topic of discussion and negotiation in the recently enacted legislation.

No luck.

Evidently, legislators love 6-hour public hearings, and annual bailout proceedings. It's much easier to pass the bills along to disempowered ratepayers than to engage in responsible governance.

Already, Exelon has announced to Bloomberg Press that it's possible that the Byron nuclear station could become economically challenged as early as 2017. We asked legislators during the House Energy Committee hearing on the Exelon bailout if they will convene more six hour hearings to debate more bailouts when Dresden becomes challenged, or Braidwood, or LaSalle. Then, they can start with the coal communities. Or alternately, they can plan ahead for the inevitable.

Now that Exelon has received its pound of flesh, the public needs protection. The Spring legislative session would not be too soon to enact a "just transitions" provision that protects both communities affected by powerplant closures, and Illinois ratepayers now forced to pay ransom to delay them.

But then, that would require governance. And this is Illinois.

--David A. Kraft, Director, Nuclear Energy Information Service--