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March 6, 1987

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United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Washington, D.C.

Dear Sirs:

The enclosed editorial from the Wall Street Journal (the largest daily circulation of any newspaper in the country, incidentally) expresses my feelings perfectly.

Can it be that the politicians fear that a test would be successful?

Sincerely,

Morris Seldin

Morris Seldin

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WALL ST. JOURNAL - 3/2/87
Nuclear Politicking

Opposition to nuclear power in the U.S. long ago left off whatever basis in fact it may have had and is now mainly a political religious movement for the doomsday wing of the ecology movement. Rather than incur the wrath of these evening-news activists, politicians frequently join their opposition to nuclear-generated power. Last week, the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission struck a blow against anti-nuke politicking.

It rejected the pleas of several governors who said the operation of some power reactors would endanger public health and safety. The commissioners voted 4 to 1 to make it easier for utilities to get an operating license where local governments refuse to cooperate with planning for emergencies. The vote is subject to 60 days of public comment and is likely to meet a court challenge.

Emergency planning sounds like a reasonable cautionary measure. In fact, it has become little more than a stalling tactic. Immediately at issue are the Seabrook plant near the New Hampshire-Massachusetts border and Long Island Lighting's Shoreham facility. Each of these reactors, which cost more than \$4 billion to build, has yet to get an operating license to start generating electricity for its region because state and local authorities refuse to participate in federally required emergency-evacuation drills. For anti-nuke local officials, this technical device is a de facto veto over the start-up of these completed plants.

At an NRC hearing in Washington last Tuesday, New York's Gov. Mario Cuomo called the proposed rule change "a blatant disregarding of the need for evacuation." Gov. Michael Dukakis of Massachusetts is standing in the way of the Seabrook plant. Also on hand to pound away on the anti-nuke tom-toms were the governors of

Vermont and Ohio, as well as Sens. Kennedy, Moynihan and D'Amato. Some activist protesters in the hearing room cheered, hooted and sang "God Bless America."

These histrionics about threats to public health and safety are unfounded. The chances of a major nuclear accident are remote, given the extensive safeguards and containment measures the industry has installed to accommodate wave after wave of objections. Each new safety measure brings little more than restagings of melodramatic anti-nuke protests.

The newest wrinkle, expressed at the NRC hearing, is to argue that the commission's ruling violates President Reagan's commitment to federalism. State and local officials, however, already have had input into the nuclear-reactor approval process along every step of the way, from site selection to design and construction to start-up. The Seabrook and Shoreham plants didn't just suddenly appear one day. They were the result of more than 10 years of planning, hearings and construction. Now the governors are using evacuation and federalism gimmicks to prevent operation.

The delays at Shoreham and Seabrook will mean large future costs for both consumers and investors. The governors' opposition to operation represents a financial burden and jeopardizes the security of future electricity supplies in those locales.

After all this time, there's no good reason that these plants shouldn't receive permission for full-scale operation. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission, which in the past 15 years has been far more tolerant of anti-nuke obstruction than mere prudence demands, finally is getting fed up. Its vote to override nuclear politicking is long overdue.