



Seabrook power contract stirs strong media response

By Guy Page

Sometimes, you hit a nerve.

That's the best way to explain the media reaction to what we thought, at the time, was a low-key energy update published June 30 on the Vermont Energy Partnership blog, and then sent via email link to our 90-plus members. Then, almost as an afterthought, we sent the posting to the Vermont media, in the spirit of "FYI, in case you haven't heard, Vermont utilities have announced plans to buy even more power from Seabrook nuclear power plant in New Hampshire."

The reaction was swift and clear. No, they hadn't heard. And yes, they too wondered why Vermont utilities that had spurned Vermont Yankee power contract offers are now seeking additional power from out-of-state Seabrook.

The Associated Press responded promptly, in the form of a reporter's "tell me more" phone call. The resulting story – headlined "[Vermont Ducking Energy Problems?](#)" - ran in Vermont, San Francisco, Kansas City, and Washington D.C. daily newspapers. After reviewing Vermont's zealous pursuit of out-of-state nuclear and natural gas power, the story asks rhetorically: "Is greener-than-thou Vermont just exporting its energy problems?" The answer: "Vermont remains a big importer of energy - much of it from sources that bring complaints from environmentalists and would not be allowed inside the state's borders."

A [July 8 story by Vermont Watchdog.org](#), a new web-based news outlet, focuses on lost employment and tax income. Reporter Bruce Parker's story entitled "Utilities buy nuclear capacity from New Hampshire as Vermont dismantles nuke plant" includes this extended quote from VTEP Communications Director Guy Page:

"There is a very sad irony to this situation. The source of power that had been demonized by Vermont's energy leaders is now being embraced because it's a decent, clean, low-cost solution to their energy problem. While it's true [Seabrook power] is a good deal and it's low carbon, Vermont is not getting the jobs. Vermont is not getting the tax revenue."

This story also appeared in several other Vermont websites and newspapers. And – significantly – it got the attention of the *Caledonian-Record*, a St. Johnsbury-based daily newspaper in the Northeast Kingdom. Publisher Todd Smith – the fourth generation of Smiths to publish the paper - wrote a [July 11 editorial](#) that blistered Vermont energy policy and politics, closing with this damning judgment: "The only difference between Seabrook and Yankee is that the latter was safer in the eyes of regulators, paid dozens of millions in state property and income taxes, kept energy prices low for Vermont businesses, and provided thousands of direct and indirect jobs."

Furthermore, at least seven newspapers ran the initial VTEP blog post as an op-ed/letter to the editor. A follow-up op-ed to the Associated Press story, authored by VTEP President Brad Ferland, also appeared in a half-dozen newspapers.



Clearly the downside of outsourcing Vermont energy production hit a nerve with Vermont media. Smith's editorial noted that Gov. Peter Shumlin applauded the first Seabrook contract in 2011: "Nuclear power from Seabrook is cheap power. Cheap power is an absolute essential to Vermont people who are having trouble paying their bills. Our economic growth depends on having cheap power."

To his praise of nuclear power we at the Partnership might reply: "Well said, Governor. That's what many of us have been saying all along about Vermont Yankee. It's just too bad that not enough people in Montpelier were listening."

But that's in the past. Now that we are where we are, without Vermont Yankee's low-cost, low-carbon contribution to the state and regional power portfolio, will state leaders further embrace the existing nuclear power in the region to keep costs and carbon emissions down?