

Millstone bill clears the Senate and goes to the House

A two-year political odyssey by Dominion Energy to convince the Connecticut General Assembly that its Millstone nuclear station needed new rules for selling electricity to remain economically viable neared an end Friday.

The Senate voted 23-8 to approve and send to the House legislation that empowers state energy officials to allow Millstone, if deemed in the public interest, to compete with other carbon-free sources of electricity, including hydro, wind and solar. No vote was immediately scheduled in the House.

If permitted by the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection and Public Utilities Regulatory Authority, Millstone will be competing to sell a significant portion of its power in a market segment that commands higher prices than it can currently obtain competing against natural-gas plants.

DEEP would solicit proposals for up to 12 million megawatt-hours of energy annually from zero-carbon electricity sources that meet certain requirements. If deemed to be in the ratepayers' best interest, DEEP would require the state's two major distribution systems, Eversource and United Illumination, to buy the zero-carbon energy.

The amount of energy that could be sold in the new market is more than half the output of Millstone.

The brief debate in the Senate revolved less around energy diversity – Dominion had threatened to close Millstone, which meets about half the state's energy needs and nearly all its carbon-free electricity – than the feared economic impact of losing the plant.

“This is a jobs bill and an economic stability bill,” said Sen. Cathy Osten, D-Sprague.

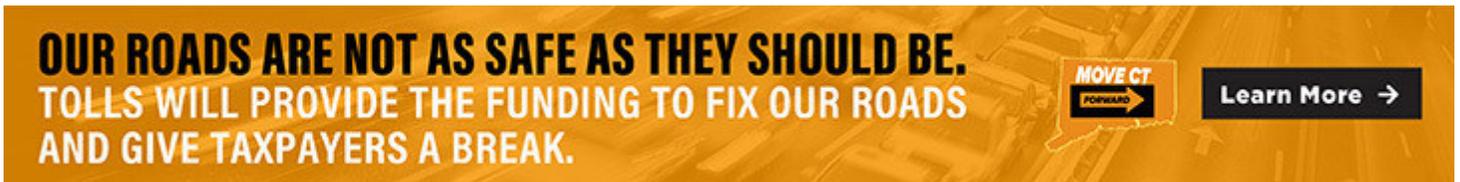
Whether DEEP goes ahead with the new energy procurement rests on the appraisal of the economic viability of the nuclear industry in Connecticut now underway by the department and the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority. It is to be completed by Feb. 1 and assess the potential loss of Millstone on electric markets, fuel diversity, greenhouse gas emissions and economic impact.



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Sens. Paul Formica and Cathy Osten, the two main sponsors, watch the votes recorded on the Millstone bill.



(<http://www.movectforward.com/?>

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Osten said the bill could save 1,400 well-paying jobs at Millstone, plus another 4,000 that rely in part on the station.

“This is truly a bipartisan effort in what is not only a jobs and economics bill specific to southeast Connecticut, but impactful for all the state of Connecticut and New England,” said Sen. Paul Formica, R-East Lyme, who worked in tandem with Osten on the bill.

Osten and Formica represent adjacent districts. Waterford, the home of Millstone, is represented by Formica.

Formica said the bill is not a bailout for Millstone, but it was opposed by consumer groups and competitors as tilting a portion of the electric market toward the nuclear plant, potentially to the detriment of other renewables.

“The bottom line for us is it gives us a path to controlling our own destiny and achieving some stability,” said Kevin Hennessy, who oversees government relations for Millstone.

Six Democrats and two Republicans voted against the bill. The Democrats were Beth Bye of West Hartford, Terry Gerratana of New Britain, Ted Kennedy Jr. of Branford, Gayle Slossberg of Milford, Mae Flexer of Killingly and Marilyn Moore of Bridgeport. The Republicans were Joe Markley of Southington and Len Suzio of Meriden.

Four senators with connections to public utilities or electric companies recused themselves: Democrat John Fonfara of Hartford and Republicans Kevin Witkos of Canton, John Kissel of Enfield and George Logan of Ansonia. Democrat Douglas McCrory of Hartford also missed the vote.