Vt. GOP Leader Hits Democrats Over Nuclear Plant

DAVE GRAM, Associated Press

MONTPELIER, Vt. (AP) — The chairman of the Vermont Republican Party attacked Attorney General Bill Sorrell and his fellow Democrats on Friday over their efforts to close the Vermont Yankee nuclear plant.

The criticism from GOP chairman Jack Lindley came two days after a federal appeals court ruled against Vermont, writing that state laws aimed at closing the Vernon reactor when its license expired in 2012 were pre-empted by federal law.

"Vermonters deserve an attorney general (who) protects the state in a responsible manner and who is separated from politically motivated decisions," Lindley said in a statement. "Bill Sorrell clearly has not lived up to those expectations."

He added that Gov. "Peter Shumlin, Bill Sorrell, and the legislature's choice to fight Vermont Yankee, no matter how one views the power plant, was ill-advised, inappropriate, and ultimately ineffective. The state of Vermont has nothing to show for it now, except wasted resources."

The legal battle with Vermont Yankee's owner, New Orleans-based Entergy Corp., was triggered in 2010, when the Vermont Senate voted 26-4 against a measure that would have authorized a state board to grant Vermont Yankee a permit to operate for an additional 20 years. Lawmakers were concerned about the plant's safety, age, and misstatements by plant management about components at the reactor.

Four Republicans, including last year's GOP gubernatorial nominee, then-Sen. Randy Brock, joined the majority in favor of closing the plant, but Lindley said in an interview Friday the vote was "ill-advised. It was just not the right thing for the state of Vermont."

After being granted the federal license it also needed for continued operation, Entergy sued the state and won a first round in the form of a ruling in 2012 from a federal district court judge in Brattleboro.

The state appealed but largely lost that appeal this week. But Sorrell has said the ruling worked out well in one respect: The court overruled a part of the lower-court decision saying the state had violated the U.S. Constitution by trying to demand cut-rate power from Vermont Yankee if it were allowed to continue operating.

A win for Entergy on that point would have required the state to pay the company's legal bills, estimated at $5 million and climbing.

Sorrell said in an interview Friday, "I don't want to get into a war of words with Jack

Lindley ... but I do question his math skills."

He said Vermont had spent about $500,000 on the appeal, and achieved a savings for taxpayers of more than $5 million.

Sorrell said of his defense against the initial lawsuit, "It's my duty to defend the laws the Legislature enacts."

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