

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 12, 2018

Kristine L. Svinicki, Chair
Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Mail Stop O-16G4
Washington, DC 20555-0001

Dear Chair Svinicki:

We are writing to express our concerns regarding recent events at the Pilgrim Nuclear Power Station (“Pilgrim”) in Plymouth, Massachusetts, which is owned by Entergy Corporation. Given the Nuclear Regulatory Commission’s (NRC) responsibility in ensuring the safety of nuclear plant operations, we ask that you and your staff address these concerns as soon as possible in accordance with applicable laws, rules and regulations.

Pilgrim is currently in Column 4 of the NRC’s Oversight Process Action Matrix, the Multiple/Repetitive Degraded Cornerstone Column, which is the lowest safety designation a plant can receive without being required to shut down. Pilgrim must not be allowed to languish in Column 4 for the remaining 18 months of operation ahead of its anticipated shutdown.

We share the concerns of local residents on the safety of the plant’s operations as long as it remains in Column 4. The apparent failure on behalf of Pilgrim management to exhibit due caution ahead of a winter storm earlier this year—for which moderate to major flooding and extreme wind gusts were forecast—is just a recent example of an alarming event at this plant.

The New England region is subject to severe winter weather events which often result in damage to energy transmission systems. The power and potential of these storms has intensified in recent years, which has had a significant impact on the operator’s ability to keep Pilgrim connected to the electric grid. This connection ensures that on-site safety systems are not subject to malfunction due to loss of power.

Over the past few years, Pilgrim has had several incidents of loss of offsite power (LOOP) that have necessitated shutdowns of operations. Despite this history of LOOPS, the operator made the decision not to do a preemptive shutdown prior to a winter storm in the first week of this year. On January 4, during the height of the storm, the operator announced that it would be performing a manual shutdown of energy generation operations at Pilgrim due to an unforeseen LOOP. We understand from NRC staff that existing requirements for winter storm shutdowns were not considered met in this case, and request responses to the following questions:

1. What are the specific conditions that are required to prompt a preemptive shutdown, and how were they not met by Pilgrim in this case?

2. What steps does the NRC plan to take to prevent future emergency shutdowns caused by LOOPs?
3. What was the effect of the LOOP on Pilgrim's operations?
4. Has NRC considered broadening the winter shutdown requirements, especially in the case of Column 4 plants with subpar safety records?
5. Last year, the NRC reduced the level of inspections staff at Pilgrim from three inspectors to two, returning it to the standard level of resident inspectors for nuclear sites. Does the NRC believe that the presence of a third resident inspector would help avoid unforeseen shutdowns or push Pilgrim to more rapidly move out of Column 4?

The well-being of our constituents depends on the NRC's commitment to establishing standards that keep plants functioning safely and to ensuring that operators continually meet those standards. We look forward to your response to these questions and appreciate your consideration.

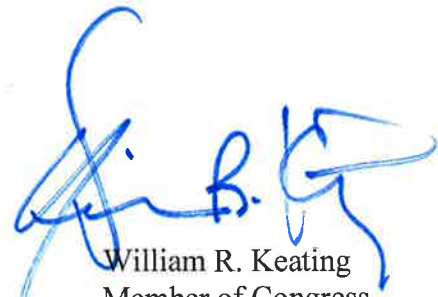
Sincerely,



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



William R. Keating
Member of Congress