

**JOSH UNRUH, SELECTBOARD CHAIRMAN, VERMONT
TESTIMONY FOR THE RECORD
OHIO STATE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ENERGY GENERATION
APRIL 23, 2019**

Good morning. Thank you to Chairmen Stein and O'Brien, as well as the members of this committee for consideration of my testimony today. My name is Josh Unruh and I am the Selectboard Chairman for Vernon, Vermont. For much of my life, I have lived, worked and raised my family in Vernon, which is also the home of the now shuttered Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Station.

When the Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Plant began commercial operation in 1972, our town grew around it. New homes were built, new businesses opened, families grew, and a mutually beneficial partnership was forged between the nuclear industry and residents.

Vermont Yankee was one of the largest employers in our part of the state, and the employees were an important part of our community and the communities surrounding Vernon. Our neighbors and friends made Vermont Yankee a safe and reliable energy source for our community for over 40 years.

With the help of Vermont Yankee, our town grew into a beautiful place to live and raise a family, with an excellent school, reliable infrastructure, and some of the best municipal facilities in our region. Vermont Yankee helped define our community by providing well-paying jobs and stable employment, and acting as a responsible and involved corporate neighbor. Local businesses, as well as non-profit groups, benefited from Vermont Yankee's support and its employees' activity in the community. Vermont Yankee never failed to carry out on its promise to give back to the community by doing business locally and providing significant revenues to small businesses throughout the region.

However, when Vermont Yankee closed, the cornerstone of our local community disappeared, causing families and friends to move away, and in turn, our businesses shuttered and many community members were left searching for jobs. About 300 million dollars a year no longer circulates in Vermont's economy due to the plant's closure. Sadly, our small businesses are feeling that crunch the most, with reports as high as 20 percent in lost revenues. In addition, \$58 million in payroll per year is no longer paid to the over 500 people Vermont Yankee once directly employed.

This money no longer supports the town of Vernon, the community's small businesses, and the many non-profits around the region that relied on Vermont Yankee. Programs that serve our youngest population have been greatly reduced or eliminated, and services for our elderly population are at risk. The engine that drove our community died, and our town and region's economic development has eroded because of it.

Directly after the closure of Vermont Yankee residents regretfully voted NOT to fund any of the social services that traditionally aided those in our community who were most at-risk. Financial pressures in the face of rising taxes have forced residents to make difficult choices to make ends meet. Our only local retail store closed, housing values plummeted, and taxes are expected to continue to increase. Residents have been forced to fill the financial gap in order to maintain minimum town services. Increases in property taxes and declining home values placed a significant burden on those members of

our community that can least afford it. Unequivocally, the closure of Vermont Yankee caused hardship and panic in our community.

The impact has been more than financial. The culture and identity of our town will be forever changed. When Vermont Yankee closed, families moved or were torn apart when houses couldn't sell and some parents were forced to find work at other plants – only able to come home on the weekends, if they are lucky. Our friends were scattered to other states when the cornerstone of our economy disappeared. Vernon has not been the only town affected by the closure of Vermont Yankee. A tri-county region that includes Massachusetts and New Hampshire has suffered the loss of business, support and employment. In the absence of political and legal battles, it is conceivable that the plant could have continued operations well into the future. It could have continued to provide good paying jobs, it could have continued to support local services and projects and it could have continued to provide safe, reliable and affordable energy for New England. Those prospects were lost because of inaction to save the facility.

Still, Vernon is a proud community, with a backbone in electric generation and agriculture. We were a thriving town before Vermont Yankee and will continue to endure after it's decommissioning, but we will never be the same. If we could build a new nuclear plant and bring our families and friends back to Vernon, we would do it in a heartbeat. In turn we would be able to bring back clean reliable energy and ensure stability to our economy and our power grid.

The fate of Vernon does not have to be the fate of communities here in Ohio. I encourage you, as you consider the future of your state's nuclear power plants, to remember what happened in Vernon, Vermont. While we cannot turn back the clock for our town, we urge you to learn from our experience and do what is best for your communities.