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Latest attack on power plant will hit pocketbooks

By John Durso Jr.

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In the midst of the worst economic decline in seven decades, leave it to Albany to put the interests of fish eggs and larvae ahead of New York's working families.

That's exactly what state environmental regulators are doing as they bow to a small cadre of environmental extremists and demand that, to comply with the federal Clean Water Act, the Indian Point power plant - which provides a whopping 30% of New York City's and Westchester County's energy - construct massive cooling towers to protect marine life, or else potentially be shut down.

The ruling, issued this month, would raise electric rates if not lead to the plant's shutdown, with minimal environmental improvements. The regulators say that the plant takes in tremendous amounts of Hudson River water to create steam for turbines and to cool the reactors, then pumps warmer water back into the river, hurting fish populations in various ways - and is therefore intolerable.

Even if the claims about massive damage to marine life were true, we have to ask, bluntly, this question: What's more important, protecting jobs and working families or protecting fish?

But the claims aren't accurate. The Hudson's fish population is actually thriving, and 95% of fish eggs die naturally. Even Riverkeeper's Robert Kennedy Jr., one of the leading anti-Indian Point advocates, said the Hudson "produces more pounds of fish per acre than any other water body in the North Atlantic."

New Yorkers should understand what it would mean to force Indian Point to build these massive cooling towers on the banks of the Hudson. It would cost nearly \$1 billion in ratepayer funds. It would require massive earth-moving and large-scale dynamite blasts. No wonder why the Village of Buchanan, where the towers would be built, is staunchly opposed.

The truth is, this proposal is an ugly Trojan Horse to close the plant or otherwise financially punish its owners.

That's what the anti-nuclear activists have wanted for years, despite the plant's absolutely vital role in powering New York.

But the zealots conveniently ignore the fact that nuclear power is environmentally friendly; that's why President Obama among others has embraced new nuclear power development.

In fact, it's in good part because New York has a high amount of nuclear power that it has the lowest carbon dioxide emissions, per capita, of any state in the country. If we were producing all the energy generated by Indian Point with fossil fuels, it would mean more than 10 million tons of additional carbon dioxide pumped into the air. That's to say nothing of other harmful emissions like sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxides - toxic substances that also harm human health, and which are especially problematic in densely populated areas like New York City.

Federal regulators have consistently given Indian Point top marks for safety. And the plant has for decades been providing the New York City region clean, affordable power - even in the dog days of summer. Now, because of exaggerated claims about threats to fish, rates are set to soar - or the plant could even close. It's insanity. It's time for the fishing expedition to end - and for common sense to prevail.

Durso is the executive director of the New York Affordable Reliable Electricity Alliance, a group of business, labor and community groups. Entergy, the operator of Indian Point, is a dues-paying member of the alliance.