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VALLEY VIEWS: N.Y. nuclear power can't be dismissed

From my work as a co-founder of Greenpeace to my current focus on sustainability, I have heard all the arguments both for and against nuclear energy. It is unfortunate that too often, only the fervent anti-nuclear perspective is heard.

But there is more than one perspective.

Carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions from transportation and electricity generation are real threats to the ecosystem. Other toxic emissions from these sources, such as nitrogen oxides, sulfur dioxide, and particulate matter are linked to health complications such as asthma and heart disease.

From an environmental standpoint, a mix of nuclear and renewable energy sources such as hydroelectric, wind and geothermal is the best combination to meet energy demand while working to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

As a high-capacity, base-load energy source, nuclear energy is the most efficient source of energy available and produces near-zero carbon dioxide emissions.

New York state would be wise to keep its six nuclear reactors, as they are key in meeting the state's energy needs while mitigating millions of tons of greenhouse gas emissions that would otherwise result from fossil fuel power plants.

The fact is that Indian Point nuclear power plant in Westchester makes the region a cleaner and healthier place to live: Replacing the facility's 2,000 megawatts of electricity supply would require a minimum of four to five natural gas plants, which would increase pollution emissions by an estimated 14 million tons of carbon dioxide, 212 tons of sulfur dioxide, 143 tons of carbon monoxide, and 118 tons of particulate matter every year.

New York faces dire air quality issues, some of the worst in the United States. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has consistently found the downstate region to be in violation of federal ozone and particulate levels.

In the 1970s, New York's air quality was even worse and the Hudson River was so polluted, it was "dead" in some areas. As Bobby Kennedy said in 2006: "Today, the Hudson is the richest water body in the continental United States. It has more fish per acre than any river in the country." By mitigating pollution from fossil fuel plants that result in acid rain and other problems, New York's nuclear power plants make the Hudson cleaner.

A dependable supply of energy is critical for the downstate region's hospitals, mass transit, schools, government buildings and homes. And with the goals of reducing greenhouse gases and improving the environment and air quality, emissions-free energy production facilities like Indian Point have never been more important than they are today. If New York state is serious about these goals, retaining its clean energy sources while working to integrate renewable sources is critical.

Those who oppose the license renewal of Indian Point must realize what is at stake for the region's environment. Overlooking the importance of nuclear energy in today's energy mix could be a costly mistake.

Patrick Moore is a co-founder of Greenpeace, is chairman and chief scientist of Greenspirit Strategies Ltd. and an adviser to the New York Affordable Reliable Electricity Alliance (www.area-alliance.org).