

July 22, 2014 | By Christine Clark

David Victor Delivers Testimony to Nuclear Regulatory Commission on San Onofre Decommission

The IR/PS professor serves as chairman of the Southern California Edison Community Engagement Panel

David Victor, UC San Diego School of International Relations and Pacific Studies professor and director of the Laboratory on International Law and Regulation, gave his first testimony to the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) Tuesday, July 15 as part of his role to help keep the public informed about the decommissioning of the San Onofre Nuclear Power Plant.

The testimony comes six months after Victor's selection as chairman of the Southern California Edison Community Engagement Panel. The panel is made up of members drawn broadly from the community—mayors, members of city and county councils, organized labor and the military. According to utility officials, he was chosen to lead the panel because he has the vision, leadership and experience to bring together a diverse group of concerned people.

At the July 15 event, Victor, an internationally recognized leader in research on energy and climate change policy as well as energy markets, highlighted the historical significance of decommissioning of the San Onofre Nuclear Power Plant. The process could take decades to complete.

“This decision marks closure of the largest civilian nuclear power plants in the United States,” Victor said. “The plant, like many in the U.S., has had an uneven relationship with the local communities. It has been a huge source of employment, investment, electricity and revenue for



David Victor

these communities.”

Victor addressed the concerns many community members are voicing over the plant’s storage of nuclear waste (spent fuel). “[This] topic looms large in the community, as it does, I am sure, in most communities. And it should,” Victor said. “As a matter of national policy, it is insane for us to be accumulating fuel at many dozen sites scattered around the country rather than at a handful of centralized sites.”

He added, “Fixing this problem—which is not unlike many other large, difficult policy problems the nation faces—is not within the hands of any single agency or political body.”

Victor spoke about possible solutions to the problem of decentralized nuclear waste storage including potentially making large payments to communities that host the fuel; however he conveyed how that strategy has not been successful in the past.

“I am mindful that nobody is really ‘in charge’ of this issue, but NRC could play a more conspicuous role perhaps in organizing some strategies,” Victor said.

Victor also addressed the need for clear long-term regulatory strategies for decommissioned plants across the country.

“As a person who has observed this process from the outside and now, suddenly, to be thrust into the middle of the decommissioning process I have been struck that every plant seems to be feeling its way through the process,” Victor said. “Issues arise and there isn’t an obvious plan or set of expectations for how they would be resolved.”

He expressed his view that NRC should undertake a special effort to articulate a serious strategy that addresses every major front in decommissioning, which includes fuel storage, shrinking of the licensed site, dismantling, emergency preparedness and other key topics.

Victor also discussed how his role and the role of the California Edison Community Engagement Panel is to keep people informed of the nuclear plant decommissioning process, an issue which often draws a strong emotional response from the public.

“All of us have a responsibility to focus on the areas of real risk and uncertainty and not on chimeras and red herrings,” Victor said. “I have no illusion that this is easy, for it is one of the ongoing challenges in any democratic society that manages complex modern technologies.”

To read the full July 15 testimony to the NRC, go [here](#) (PDF).

For more information on David Victor and the Laboratory on International Law and Regulation, go to <http://ilar.ucsd.edu>.

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