

Letter to the editor of the New York Times

Your assertion (editorial, Jan. 7) that the Nuclear Regulatory Commission was “negligent” for allowing a brief period of continued operation of the Davis-Besse nuclear power plant before inspections fails to acknowledge the **unanimous** decision by the relevant expert staff that continued operation would not pose a significant safety risk.

Assuring protection of the public health and safety is the highest priority of the NRC. No one was aware of the reactor vessel head corrosion that was discovered in the subsequent inspections. A safety judgment, rather than costs to the licensee, guided the NRC decision. It is Monday-morning quarterbacking to question the decision in the false light of subsequent knowledge.

The NRC has been highly critical of both licensee and staff shortcomings in connection with the unexpected head corrosion, and we are taking stern corrective measures to ensure no recurrences. Claims of NRC “timidity” are unjustified.

/s/

Richard A. Meserve
NRC Chairman
Rockville, MD, Jan.7, 2003