

**Statement of Kristine L. Svinicki
Commissioner, U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
before the
Subcommittee on Clean Air and Nuclear Safety
Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works
March 24, 2009**

Three Mile Island – Looking Back on Thirty Years of Lessons Learned

Thank you Chairman Carper, Senator Vitter, and members of the subcommittee for the opportunity to appear before you at today's hearing. I support Chairman Klein's testimony and add my voice to those of my colleagues in supporting the commemoration of this significant event in our Nation's nuclear history. Today's hearing and the seminar to be held tomorrow for all employees at the NRC are important opportunities for the community of nuclear safety professionals to pause, reflect on this historic event, and remain vigilant against technical complacency or overconfidence.

Since I am one of the NRC employees who was not involved in the nuclear profession at the time of the Three Mile Island event, in preparation for this hearing, I have studied a number of the written histories and other critical reviews. The President's Commission on the Accident at Three Mile Island is mentioned in Chairman Klein's testimony. In developing its final report to President Carter on the event, that Commission took more than 150 formal depositions and interviewed an even larger group of individuals. At public hearings, it heard testimony and collected documentary material that filled about 300 linear feet of shelf space.

In analyzing all this detail, however, their strongest conclusions were sometimes startlingly simple. Among their conclusions was the following statement:

“In the testimony we received, one word occurred over and over again. That word is ‘mindset.’ At one of our public hearings, the director of NRC's Division of Systems Safety used that word five times within a span of 10 minutes. The most serious ‘mindset’ is the preoccupation of everyone with the safety of equipment, resulting in the down-playing of the importance of the human element in nuclear power generation. We are tempted to say that while an enormous effort was expended to assure that safety-related equipment functioned as well as possible, and that there was backup equipment in depth, what the NRC and the industry have failed to recognize sufficiently is that the human beings who manage and operate the plants constitute an important safety system.”

Mr. Chairman, in my work at the NRC over the past year, I have found an organization of dedicated safety professionals who are ever mindful of this important fact and who are committed to its enduring lessons. Thank you again for this opportunity and I look forward to answering your questions.