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Remarks by
Dr. Shirley Ann Jackson, Commissioner
United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission
before the
Nuclear Energy Institute's Annual
Nuclear Energy Assembly
The Mayflower Hotel, Washington, DC
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Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I am delighted to participate in this year's Nuclear Energy Institute's annual Nuclear Energy Assembly. The NEI is to be commended for providing these opportunities for discussions of important issues related to our energy future. Both the NRC and the nuclear industry have very important roles to play as we seek innovative ways to revitalize the regulation of nuclear power.

I will share with you some of my initial views of our respective roles. But first I will take few minutes to introduce myself since this is my first public speaking appearance as a Commissioner of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, as well as my first appearance before this Assembly.

Background

In 1973, I received my Ph.D. from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (M.I.T.) in the field of theoretical elementary particle physics. In the mid-1970's, I worked at the Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory in Batavia, Illinois, and in the Theoretical Division of the European Center for Nuclear Research in Geneva, Switzerland, where I performed theoretical research on the physics of strongly interacting particles. In 1976, I joined AT&T Bell Laboratories, and over the ensuing 15 years, worked successively, in theoretical physics research, solid state and quantum physics research, and optical physics research. My work experience covered a variety of rather specialized and highly technical fields.

Over the past two decades, I have held a number of concurrent appointments in academia, industry, and government. These positions entailed executive-level managerial, budgeting,

and policy-making responsibilities. They include being a Life Member of the M.I.T. Corporation (Board of Trustees), where, until recently, I served on the M.I.T. Corporation Executive Committee, which includes oversight of the M.I.T. Lincoln Laboratory. I am a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and a Fellow of the American Physical Society, and a member of a number of other professional organizations. Ten years ago, under New Jersey Governor Tom Kean, I became a founding member of the Commission on Science and Technology to foster university-industry collaboration and to spur the growth of industry and jobs in the State. Under Governor Jim Florio, I served as a member of the Board of Governors of Rutgers University from 1990 to 1991. Last year, Governor Christine Todd Whitman of New Jersey designated me as Vice-Chair of the State's Economic Master Plan Commission. Also last year, I was appointed to the Department of Energy's Advisory Board Task Force on Alternative Futures for the DOE Multipurpose National Laboratories and the National Renewable Energy Laboratory ("Galvin" Task Force).

I come to the Commission armed with experience gained from my own professional career, as well as from my tenure as chairperson of the Nuclear Oversight Committee of the Public Service Enterprise Group and as a member of the Advisory Council of the Institute of Nuclear Power Operations (INPO). I have also had meetings with academia and industry representatives, and have gained further insights from reviewing the transcripts of Congressional hearings, as well as a number of government studies and papers, industry produced documents, and documents from the public, and the national and trade press.

NRC Issues

Let me make a few remarks about the NRC itself. As you know, I will become the next Chairman of the NRC, following Dr. Selin's departure on July 1, 1995. This will be challenging. Chairman Selin's accomplishments at the NRC have been exemplary. The loss of Commissioner de Planque also will be keenly felt by the agency. Her contributions to the agency have been recognized by everyone. Fortunately, Commissioner Rogers will remain. I look forward to working with Commissioner Rogers as the agency meets the many challenges that lie ahead. I will also press the Administration to nominate appropriate candidates so that the Commission can be brought up to full complement as quickly as possible.

As I begin my service at the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, I can see a variety of issues which will loom large for both the NRC and the nuclear industry between now and the end of this decade. Several of these I discussed in my Senate confirmation statement.

In my statement I mentioned decommissioning as it is linked to high-level and low-level waste disposal. As you are all aware, the process of developing a repository for the permanent disposal of high level waste from nuclear power plants has lagged. The nation does need a means to manage safely, for the long term, nuclear waste, both currently existing and that which will be generated by future nuclear operations. As I said in my confirmation statement, it is not NRC's role to promote a particular option for accomplishing safe waste storage and disposal, but the NRC must be in a position to meet its statutory responsibilities to conduct licensing reviews of the planned DOE disposal facility.

Low-level waste is also an important issue for the NRC. This also involves NRC Agreement States, various abandoned nuclear sites, as well as onsite storage of low-level waste at licensed facilities.

Of course, most of you are concerned about nuclear power production and therefore necessarily reactor safety issues. In his talk, Dr. Selin has reviewed with you a number of the current reactor safety issues pending before the NRC. Because I am new to the Commission, I am not as familiar with the specific regulatory aspects as are the sitting members of the Commission. However, I can tell you that I believe in the substantial importance of maintenance in nuclear power production and as a contributing factor to overall reactor safety. I am pleased to see as I begin my service on the Commission that work in this important area has already been undertaken and some success achieved.

It clearly makes sense that, nationally, we make the most efficient use of our energy resources. In the case of nuclear plants, that means not shutting them down prematurely -- if they are still capable of years of safe power production. I note that the Commission has promulgated its final rule, Part 54, which delineates the procedures for the relicensing of nuclear reactors. I intend to familiarize myself with this important regulation in preparation for any applications to extend the operating life of nuclear reactors. In any case, the basic criteria for extending the operating life of current generating facilities is whether the facility can be operated safely and with adequate protection of public health and safety.

As for the NRC interaction with the nuclear industry, the diligent search for areas where requirements are burdensome and not commensurate with corresponding safety benefits, must continue. Because of its experience in the operation and management of commercial nuclear power plants, the industry must continue to interact with the staff in identifying examples of changes to regulations and regulatory practices that the industry believes are appropriate.

Relevant to this is risk-based regulation. There will be much for me to learn here, but I believe that benefits may flow from some transition to a more risk-based regulatory approach from purely deterministically based regulation. I know that the industry has made substantial investments in developing risk methodology, as has the NRC. I will work to assure the maximum benefit from these public and private investments. I believe that consistent and realistic application of a maturing risk methodology, combined with more traditional deterministic bases, can improve regulatory decisionmaking and reduce unnecessary regulatory burden.

In closing, during my service on the Commission, I will work to make nuclear regulation as effective as possible, while meeting our statutory responsibilities firmly but fairly for protection of public health and safety. In doing this, I intend to work to reduce unnecessary, that is not safety justified, regulatory burdens on the nuclear industry. Industry and public participation will be essential in these efforts. I want to thank you for your attention and I hope to obtain positive feedback from this assembly.

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