

No: S-15-009

November 6, 2015

CONTACT: Scott Burnell, 301-415-8200

## **Prepared Remarks of NRC Chairman Stephen G. Burns Nuclear Energy Summit – Maintaining U.S. Leadership November 6, 2015 – Washington, D.C.**

I'm glad to be here this afternoon to meet with so many distinguished leaders in government and industry. I want to take a moment to note the NRC's "part of today's conversation."

The NRC is considered the "gold standard" for nuclear regulation in the world, and a model of independence and technical competence. Independence is vital for our credibility and the public's trust in our safety and security mission. Industry success is tied, in no small way, to the credibility of the regulator.

I should emphasize that I don't believe independence means isolation. It's important that the NRC talk to the industry, talk to the Congress, talk to the public, talk to the activists, talk to DOE and other federal colleagues. It's vital to have independence from undue influence, but not to be isolated from the industry we regulate or the people on whose behalf we regulate.

In the end, sensible regulation is based on the NRC's technical expertise and experience coupled with being open to outside ideas and concepts. And then making decisions that are consistent and defensible.

The NRC has taken several steps related to our readiness regarding advanced reactor technology. In 2012, we developed our near-term and long-term approaches for both light water small modular reactors and non-light water reactors, and identified needs in such areas as research and test facilities.

And since 2013, we have been implementing a two-part joint initiative with DOE to look at general design criteria and determine which ones might need to be revised so they would be relevant to non-light water designs. The general design criteria form a foundational piece of our regulatory framework and this work will provide some clarity regarding our expectations for these new designs.

Just a few weeks ago, we co-hosted a workshop with DOE on the subject of non-light water reactors. It was well received and underscored the interest in new technologies. This workshop was a great example of the intersection of policy and regulation. There are, of course, very different roles that NRC, DOE, and industry have in developing and deploying innovative technologies. The NRC's role is to ensure the safety and security of new technologies. DOE provides support with research and project

development. And, of course, industry makes the decision whether to pursue and deploy new technologies.

While the NRC's current regulatory framework focuses on light water reactors, we are confident we could license a non-light water reactor under the current framework. However, because the NRC's reactor licensing regulations and guidance documents were developed based primarily on light-water reactor technologies, we recognize the potential knowledge gaps for both the staff and prospective applicants. We are working to address those gaps with DOE through the GAIN initiative announced earlier today, and have committed to providing technical expertise and guidance to the DOE to assist prospective applicants in understanding the NRC's regulatory processes.

So successful was the first, that the NRC and DOE will hold the Second Advanced Non-Light Water Reactors Workshop in Spring 2016. The purpose of the workshop is to explore options for increased efficiency, from both a technical and regulatory perspective, including examining both near-term and longer-term opportunities to test, demonstrate and construct prototype advanced reactors, and establish the most appropriate licensing processes.

It's important that the industry keep the NRC informed of its plans so we can plan appropriately. The horizon of nuclear power in the United States has been somewhat fuzzy and it can take time to make major course corrections. The NRC needs and welcomes open communication with the non-LWR developer community and with DOE to keep us on the right course and to optimize our planning processes and resource expenditures.

My closing point is this: In any successful national nuclear energy program, the health and safety of the public must be the paramount concern. Though the national safety regulator plays a critical role in this, at the end of the day the operator is ultimately responsible for safety. The nuclear industry in the United States understands this, and it is well-ingrained into the culture. New entrants into the field must also fully embrace the importance of safety at the earliest possible stages of development.

I am honored to participate in this event, and look forward to our discussion.