

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

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37TH ANNUAL REGULATORY INFORMATION CONFERENCE

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OPENING PLENARY

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TUESDAY

MARCH 11, 2025

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The Session was held at the Bethesda North Marriott Hotel & Conference Center and via virtual platform, at 8:00 a.m. EDT.

SPEAKERS

LAURA DUDES, Acting Director, NRR

JOHN TAPPERT, Acting Director, RES

THE HONORABLE DAVID A. WRIGHT, Chairman, NRC

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P-R-O-C-E-E-D-I-N-G-S

8:00 a.m.

MS. DUDES: Good morning. Excellent, excellent. Welcome to the 37th Regulatory Information Conference. My name is Laura Dudes. I am with the Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation, and it is a great honor to be here and to welcome all of you to this conference on behalf of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

My office, along with the Office of Nuclear Reactor Research, which is led by my colleague John Tappert -- we are cosponsors of this event and we have worked with all of our colleagues in the NRC to bring you a comprehensive and dynamic program over the course of the next three days.

John?

MR. TAPPERT: Thanks, Laura. And it's a privilege to be with you all here today. And as we begin we are honored to welcome the Joint Armed Forces Color Guard from the Military District of Washington to present the nation's colors.

In addition, we are thrilled to introduce members of the NRC: Jesse Carlson, Joe Goodridge, Janine Smith, and Yaira Diaz-Sanabria, otherwise known as the DFM Quartet, who will be singing the National Anthem along with Tiasha Berra, who will provide interpretive services.

Please rise for the presentation of the colors and the singing of the National Anthem.

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(Presentation of the colors and the singing of the National Anthem.)

MR. TAPPERT: Okay. Always a good way to start your day. Please be seated.

I know you're excited to get more details on our program for the next two-and-a-half days, but first I'd like to take a moment to recognize our distinguished former NRC Commissioners that are joining us this week, specifically Commissioner Jeffrey Merrifield and Commissioner Bill Ostendorff. We thank you for your service and commitment to nuclear safety.

MS. DUDES: Thanks. All right. Good morning again. So in honor of the NRC's 50th anniversary we are proud to present the theme for RIC 2025: Charting the Next 50 Years.

The RIC continues to be the largest conference that the NRC sponsors. Our ability to host this RIC in a hybrid manner allows for unprecedented participation. In the next three days more than 3,000 participants representing 40 countries will be actively engaged in meaningful dialogue and great conversations about nuclear safety issues.

The RIC provides an opportunity for government, industry, members of the public, international agencies, and other interested stakeholders to meet and discuss a wide range of topics.

The program provides a wealth of information and features and several distinguished speakers. To open the RIC today

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we will hear with NRC Chairman David Wright. Following Chairman Wright's remarks we are honored to welcome the Honorable Shelley Moore Capito, U.S. Senator and Chairman on the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works.

Senator Capito will speak on the Accelerating Deployment of Versatile Advanced Nuclear for Clean Energy Act of 2024, known as the ADVANCE Act.

Following our networking break this morning we will also hear remarks from Commissioner Caputo and Commissioner Hanson.

Tomorrow morning we will lead off remarks from Commissioner Crowell and followed by Commissioner Marzano.

After the midmorning break our own Executive Director for Operations Mirela Gavrilas will conduct a fireside chat entitled Beyond the ADVANCE Act.

And last but definitely not least, our last plenary tomorrow will be a special session entitled The Next 50 Years moderated by Chairman Wright.

The technical program offers 24 sessions to choose from, a wide range of topics will be covered including the fuel cycle for advanced fuel designs; potential plant restarts; implementation of risk-informed emergency preparedness regulations; adoption of artificial intelligence, which is a topic that I know is near and dear to both of our hearts right now, and

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all of ours, I suppose; development of a regulatory framework for microreactors. And that's just to name a few. So we have an incredible program of technical sessions.

These technical sessions will bring together nuclear experts from around the world offering various perspectives on the best relevant regulatory topics. Some of those sessions will be chaired by our Commissioners and our EDO.

Today at 1:30 Commissioner Crowell will chair a session entitled Advancing the ACRS, or Advisory Committee on Reactor Safeguards, advancing their safety reviews into the next 50 years.

Later this afternoon Chairman Wright will lead the session titled the Future of Fusion Power on the Grid: Building a Flexible, Resilient Regulatory Framework for Commercial Deployment of Fusion Machines.

Tomorrow afternoon Commissioner Caputo will chair a session on elevating NRC safety and efficiency through risk-informed decision making.

Later tomorrow afternoon Commissioner Hanson will chair a session on codes and standards for new and advanced reactors.

Thursday morning our own Executive Director for Operations will kick off the day chairing a session entitled The United States, Canada, and United Kingdom Small Modular Reactors

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and Advanced Reactor Trilateral Cooperation.

And last but definitely not least, Commissioner Marzano will co-chair a session on Thursday morning entitled Shortening the Half-Life of Advanced Fuel Deployment in Light Water Reactors. And he will co-chair that with our own Theresa Clark. So that's fantastic.

So during the breaks in the program, in these wonderful technical sessions, we do encourage you to take time and stop to see the 17 digital exhibits that we have in the foyer. For those who are online, we do have virtual exhibits, and they are viewable from the conference platform.

There are a wide variety of topics in our digital exhibits including digital instrumentation and controls, physical protection modeling and simulation, ADVANCE Act implementation, and many more. Feel free to stop by, interact with our staff. The NRC staff and others out in the hallway and here to meet with you, interact with you, answer questions, and develop networking relationships. So please either meet up with them today or grab their contact information so you can follow up with them later.

If you want to do something different between technical sessions and exploring our digital exhibits, consider participating in a tour of the NRC's Headquarters Operations Center. This is the facility where the NRC will train for emergency response or actually conduct an incidence response

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activity if necessary. If you're interested in this tour, please stop by the tour desk. Please note that they -- we will leave -- or those tours will leave from here at the Marriott.

You may want to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the NRC by having your photo taken or grabbing a quick selfie at the photo booth which is located outside of Ballroom H at the top of the stairs.

So there's a lot that's going to go on in the next three days. If I've provided you too many options or perhaps overwhelmed you before you've had your second cup of coffee, I can tell you that back by popular demand we have NRC's own Alysia Bone, Technical Assistant for Reactors, for Chairman Wright, who will be broadcasting from the monitors throughout the conference space and providing highlights of the schedule to help you decide what to do.

So I'm going to turn it over to John. Thank you.

MR. TAPPERT: And so now before we get started, let me provide a few housekeeping tips. The RIC is leveraging technology for audience participation. Attendees will participate in the Q&As and live polling directly from their electronic devices. To submit questions to our panelists, in-person attendees should scan the QR Codes on the screen to access the Q&A box. And virtual attendees should access the Q&A box on the right-hand side of their screens.

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Please remember to visibly display your name badges throughout the entirety of the conference. Please silence all electronic devices. All items that are left behind in the conference area or the meeting rooms will be held in the hotel lobby.

Be aware of the fire exits which are located on the sides or the back of the room.

In the event that a conference room reaches its capacity, you will be redirected to another session.

All sessions will be video-recorded and those recordings will be posted on the NRC website at the conclusion of the conference. And similarly, all presentation materials that are not currently in the website will be posted after the conference.

Your participation plays an important role in making the RIC a success. Your feedback is critical for continuous improvement of the conference each year. We encourage you to share your insights on the program format, session content, facility accommodations, et cetera by visiting the contact us link from the RIC website. It's as simple as that and we look forward to your feedback.

And lastly, I just want to take a moment to recognize the outstanding efforts of the RIC committees, our contract partners, and our panelists and speakers who have worked tirelessly

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over the past year to organize this amazing hybrid conference. The planning and execution of a conference of this magnitude requires significant commitment, creativity, and attention to detail. The dedication of all these individuals is paramount to the success of the RIC. So can we show some appreciate with a round of applause?

(Applause.)

MR. TAPPERT: And with that, welcome to the RIC.

(Video sketch played.)

ANNOUNCER: Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome your Chairman of the U.S. NRC, David Wright.

CHAIRMAN WRIGHT: Thank you. Thank you very much. That's a long walk.

All right. Got to lower this somehow. How do you lower it? There it is. That's a little better.

So good morning, everyone, and welcome to the NRC's 2025 Regulatory Information Conference. You know, this is my first year kicking off the RIC and it's an honor to do so. I want to thank President Trump for the opportunity to serve as chairman of the NRC at this point in time. I will give it everything that I have, too.

And I'd like to begin with some thank yous. First off, I want to thank our talented audio-visual team. That would be Leon and Kyle and Kevin, who are in the room somewhere in the

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back, for their help in creating the video. They took my initial idea and my draft script and they made it a lot of fun to do. I hope you enjoyed.

I'd also like to thank my former chiefs of staff: Cathy Kanatas and Shakur Walker and C.J. Fong for appearing in the video. Thank you for everything that you have done for me since I've been here.

And, Cathy, the chairmanship cookies were delicious. The downside was how many cookies I had to eat while we shot the video. Almost put myself in a sugar coma.

The security guard at the back gate, Ms. Agwe, whom I actually do see every afternoon when I walk home, you're a natural and I love your laugh.

While I'm at it, to all the security guards as a group, I have gotten to know most of them personally. They do a great job for us. So if you get a moment during the RIC, thank them for the work that they do.

The organizers of everything RIC this week have worked incredibly hard to make this a seamless event for you. I huge thank you to each of them.

I'd like to extend my welcome to Former Chairman Steve Burns, if he's in the room, and Former Commissioners Jeff Merrifield and Bill Ostendorff, who I see sitting over here. Thank you for being here.

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Next I'd like to take a moment to recognize and thank each of my fellow Commissioners: Commissioner Annie Caputo, Commissioner Chris Hanson, Commissioner Brad Crowell, and our latest addition, newest addition Matt Marzano. Thank you for your willingness and for your sacrifice to do this job and I look forward to continuing to work with each of you to make great things happen at the NRC.

I also want to thank each of your staff members on behalf of my team, Team Wright, for their work with our office to advance the agency's mission each and every day.

Speaking of Team Wright, I continue to believe you're the best team in the Federal Government, and it is an honor to work with each of you. Suzanne Dennis, Kim Lora, Charles Kreuzberger, Alysia Bone, Patty Burbank, Champa Rajapakse, Mandy Mauer, Jonathan Marciano, Jill Shepherd, and Jim O'Driscoll. Thank you for all you do in support of me, the NRC, and the American people.

Now, Commissioner Hanson, let me take a moment to thank you for your years of service as chair. You joined the Commission and led the agency during a difficult period as we went through and came out of the COVID pandemic. It was not an easy time.

So everyone, if you would, please join me in a round of applause in recognition of Commissioner Hanson's service as chair.

(Applause.)

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CHAIRMAN WRIGHT: Thank you, everyone.

And, Chris, I've already learned that being chairman is the agency's way of saying you need to fast more, sir, because I have not had any time for lunch.

Now I have to admit, and as the video shared, I struggled trying to figure out what my message should be this morning, but then I realized that although I may be in a different position today, I'm still the same man I always have been. And so I have to go about blooming where I've been planted. As a man of faith, I know God has already prepared the path ahead of me. This doesn't mean the walk will be easy, but it does mean that as long as I do those things and take care of those things that I have control over I can trust God will take care of what I can't.

Now I must be completely honest here. That hasn't always been easy for me. I had to learn it and I had to come to terms with it as I had to live it out twice in real time, once when I was diagnosed with stage 3 colon cancer and the second time when my oldest daughter Kimberly faced a very difficult battle with the same cancer just one year later at age 27. Only her situation was much worse. By the way, she's my hero.

Facing and going through these trials changed my perspective on many things, and changed Kimberly, too. For example, Kimberly says she learned how strong she was and that she could tolerate a great deal of pain. Both of us learned that

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negative thoughts and negative people had no place or purpose in our lives any longer and we're intentional about the positive in our daily lives today.

For me, I became more focused on getting as much done as I could between chemotherapy treatments while I was feeling good and I committed to finding solutions to the problems that confronted us instead of letting those problems paralyze me. Finding solutions is still my focus today; that, plus I laugh at myself a lot more, too.

And I recognize that I'm not alone. We have people in this room right now, several people I'm aware of, who are going through similar battles. I have spoken with many of them. All of them need every bit of the help, support, and prayer we can give them, too. So if you're an NRC employee in need of help, there are programs at and through the NRC that are available to you. And I encourage you to work with your supervisors to get connected.

Now, not only do I know God has prepared my path ahead, but I can give you more proof, proof that my dad has been helping, too. I was initially confirmed as an NRC Commissioner by the United States Senate on May 24th, 2018. My late-dad's birthday. That by itself was special, but there's more.

This year President Trump was sworn in on Martin Luther King Day, Monday, January 20th, 2025, also the same day that he appointed me chairman. No doubt dad was watching over things and

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helping me because he passed away on Martin Luther King Day in 2013, which was also the day of President Obama's second inaugural. How I know dad was helping prepare my way is that because Martin Luther King is a federal holiday, dad knew that. And because dad knew that, he knew my first day in the office would be the next day, January 21st, the anniversary of his death. Now I don't know about you, that's some pretty cool stuff right there. Thanks, pop.

Before I get into the meat of my remarks, I'd be remiss if I did not give you a quick family update. For anyone who works in government at any level, we know that every day we serve our families serve, too. So it's important for us to take time to acknowledge them for their sacrifices they make in support of us.

My mother is fast approaching her 94th birthday on July 22nd, a birthday that I happen to share with her, by the way. So if you can do complicated math and you want to know how young I'll be this year, she brought me into the world on her 24th birthday. Mom's a special lady with a beautiful spirit. And she looks great. Me, not so much.

My four children: Kimberly, Courtney, Austin, and Andrew, and their families are -- they're all doing well, but because there hasn't been a RIC so far without me announcing a new grandchild or two, the pressure's been on them all year to keep the streak alive for me. And as luck would have it, a month ago

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tomorrow my youngest son Andrew and his wife Morgan welcomed their first child into the world, my newest granddaughter Hadley Mae Wright. Yes, she's a wonderful gift. I got to meet her and hold her for the first time on Valentine's Day. And as her paw-paw I am over the moon with her.

Her addition to the family now gives me enough grandchildren to form my own Wright Family Grandchildren softball team. As their coach I got to tell you we're still a little young yet, so it will be a while before we actually play any games.

Now, I want to acknowledge the current moment, this current moment in time. There's been a lot of change in the last few months. There's a lot to do and there's even more change and challenges ahead of us. And most of that change is out of our control. But we are all professionals. And all of us are focused on our mission and we will get the job done. I know that you and I, we, are up to meeting the challenges before us. As we work together to meet the challenges ahead, I will need and I ask for your help.

We've received clear direction through the ADVANCE Act, and I'm happy to report we're making progress. In fact, we recently updated our NRC's mission statement which defines our core goals and guides our actions. The ADVANCE Act directed changes to our mission statement, and I think we've met that mark.

While the core mission of the NRC does not

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change -- we're here to provide for the safe and secure use of nuclear technologies -- we also must advance the nation's common defense and security by enabling the safe and secure use and deployment of nuclear technologies and radioactive materials. Advancing, enabling, deploying nuclear safety. Five important words for the future. This does not lower our safety standard at all, but instead it refocuses the NRC on mission-critical and safety-significant items for the benefit of society and the environment. We must embrace a culture of efficiently resolving issues and moving on to the next issue. However, at our core we will continue to enable the safe and secure use and deployment of nuclear energy technologies and radioactive materials and our work will continue to positively impact the energy and security landscape, both here and around the globe.

As part of this refocusing and doing our part to move forward the nation's goals for nuclear by enabling, advancing, and deploying safely we will have to widen our aperture and re-calibrate how we operate. Now this doesn't mean that we can become consultants for the industry, but we should be able to collaborate more. What I mean is that if we, the regulators, know exactly what information we need in order to make a finding we should communicate that to the applicants and licensees. We don't have to tell them how to do it or how to get it, but they should know clearly, openly, and transparently from us what is needed.

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In light of the Administration's new priorities and the direction of the Congress in the ADVANCE Act I think we have an opportunity to openly and transparently collaborate with those in and around the nuclear sector and look at process efficiencies here. There's a lot going on and it benefits all of us to communicate what our priorities are and to understand the priorities of others in and around the industry. We might not have the same items on our list every time, but having a common understanding of the needs and the concerns of each other will help everyone move forward in enabling the safe and secure use of nuclear energy technologies in an efficient process.

You know, this is a pivotal moment in time for the NRC. Domestically the nuclear industry is moving forward fast. The need for electricity is growing exponentially for both uses connected to and disconnected from the grid. It's not all about licensing reactor designs either. There's a desire to manufacture reactors in a factory and preload them with fuel before transporting them to the site. Vendors, utilities, and now end users are leaning in like never before.

By themselves the desire of the oil and gas sector to deploy hundreds of units may require a regulatory paradigm shift, but there's also industrial users, data centers, floating reactors, commercial shipping, fusion, you name it. They are all active and looking to the NRC, not just to meet their needs, but

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to anticipate and be ready for them ahead of time. On top of that, all of those prospective applicants want and need us to be efficient and timely in our reviews, too.

You know, 2024 was a busy year with many successes and improvements, so let me focus on that for a moment.

Let me start with the improvements. Last week it was announced that the NRC had jumped five spots in the 2024 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey, or FEVS, climbing from 23rd to 18th, as the best place to work in the Federal Government. I've not dug into the data yet, but I love the trend. And you should, too, because the NRC is truly a great place to work, to connect, and grow.

Now let me move onto some highlights in 2024. Now as is usually the case, there's a lot going on in the reactor world from our daily oversight activities to licensing actions for operating reactors, to preparing for first-of-a-kind advance reactors and reactor restarts. Our NRC family is working together to get the job done.

One example that I'm going to highlight is the work going into the restarting of the Palisades Nuclear Plant. The NRC has been proactively working to identify and swiftly resolve any licensing, inspection, or regulatory challenge and we're currently on track to complete the safety review and issue the bundle of licensing actions before fuel is needed on site.

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In January the staff published in the Federal Register the draft environmental assessment and the draft finding of no significant impact for Palisades. This will be the first time in our agency's history that a reactor has transitioned from decommissioning back to operations. This effort is an agencywide success story.

We're drawing from lessons learned from projects like Watts Bar and Vogtle and we'll be using the Palisades restart to inform other potential restarts like the plant formerly known as Three Mile Island Unit 1, now named the Crane Clean Energy Center, Iowa's Duane Arnold Plant, and potentially others. In advanced reactor space we've demonstrated that we can be more efficient in reviewing applications and we can point to the reviews of Kairos and Abilene Christian University as great examples of how to do it. In addition to these successful reviews the staff plans to complete the review of TerraPower two months ahead of schedule, another good news story. I'll talk more about advanced reactors in a minute because this is an area I am really excited about.

Shifting to emergency preparedness and security, our team in the Office of Nuclear Security and Incident Response, or NSIR, continues to make progress through improving its risk-informed thinking. They're a busy group that you don't hear a lot hear about, but last year they published a proposed rule that provides greater flexibility in the area of fiscal security

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for advanced reactors, which is in line with the advanced reactors' potentially safer design and lower risk profile. Truly good work there.

In the world of materials many of you may know that in the United States the NRC has an agreement program with the states. This program allows the states to assume portions of the NRC's regulatory authority through an agreement signed by the state's governor and the NRC's chairman. Currently 39 states are Agreement States in our program. The Commission just approved publication of the draft agreement between the NRC and the state of Connecticut for public comment in the Federal Register. Although we still have some actions that are yet to be executed, the agreement with the state of Connecticut appears to be on track for signing later this year and would make Connecticut our 40th Agreement State.

Another really active area in the nuclear materials sector is fusion. For fusion machines the staff provided the Commission with a proposed rule to license fusion machines under 10 CFR Part 30. This proposed rule would provide a technology-inclusive framework accommodating a wide variety of anticipated fusion machine designs and I look forward to continuing the conversation on this topic at a panel, at our panel later today in the breakouts this afternoon.

The NRC's materials side of the house is starting to embrace new and innovative ways to efficiently meet the moment in

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every area of the National Nuclear Materials Program. A great example happened recently when the NRC's Office of Enforcement partnered with the Office of Nuclear Material Safety and Safeguards and the Office of General Counsel to issue a relaxation on a 2016 confirmatory order for the Homestake Mining Company. The NRC can relax or ease its orders under certain circumstances and in this case the order was relaxed to recognize Homestake's sustained improved safety performance.

The staff was proactive here offering a timelier and more efficient process to implement the relaxation while assuring the decision was consistent with safety and the NRC's principles of good regulation. As I understand things, they surprised them with a relaxation order by handing it to them at the beginning of a routine drop-in. Nice touch. That was a nice touch.

I believe the staff's work on this is exactly what the ADVANCE Act envisions and I'd like to recognize Dave Pelton from the Office of Enforcement, John Lubinski and Jane Marshall from NMSS, and Mauri Lemoncelli and Rob Carpenter from the Office of General Counsel for their efforts.

In the area of spent fuel storage and transportation the staff issued a new regulatory guide that provides relief for certain inspections at independent spent fuel storage installation sites that are less susceptible to aging effects of corrosion; for example, inland sites that are away from the coastal zone. It's

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estimated that this guidance will yield significant savings to the industry with almost \$26 million in net savings over a 40-year period with no impact on safety.

And recently staff issued the approval of a license amendment for UrencoUSA to increase nuclear enrichment limits from five and a half percent to 10 percent which now allows for the production of enriched uranium in support of the nuclear industry's demand for low-enriched fuel.

Now zooming out and looking internationally, more and more countries are figuring out what they want to do to meet their energy needs. Nuclear is a big part of their solution, and it's a mix of both large and small reactor designs. Many of these countries want to use various U.S. designs, some that have been built in the United States and some that have yet to be built anywhere.

An important theme I heard during my international travel this past year to Kenya, Armenia, Bulgaria, Poland, and Slovenia is that these countries want to use U.S. designs that have been certified or licensed by the NRC. Some of these even said publicly that they're willing to be the first to build one of these designs if it has been certified or licensed by the NRC.

That's a change from just a couple of years ago when they wanted to use a U.S. design, but only one that had been successfully built in the United States first. This change speaks

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to the urgency they have placed on their national energy goals, their need for electricity, their need for energy security, and their need for energy independence.

The key message and takeaway for us at the NRC is that these countries need us to prioritize getting these designs through the regulatory process because they want to use NRC-certified and NRC-licensed designs over anything else. If we fail to meet the urgency of this moment, some other country is going to step in and try to fill the need, and that could be problematic on many levels.

For the past few years, you've heard Congress and others be vocal about their belief that the NRC is a burden to progress. We've all heard it. This isn't about safety because safety is and will always be our North Star, our strike zone over home plate, as you've heard me say before. Instead, it's about our process. Seriously, no one, and I mean no one is asking us to compromise safety. In fact, no one I know, no one before us, no one in engagement with us, no one considering coming before us, and no one, no one wants an unsafe plant, a facility, technology, device, medicine, machine, or procedure. Not anyone.

But what they do want and what they are asking for is for us to efficiently get to a reasonable assurance safety finding along with efficient and timely environmental reviews. They're asking for us to quit spinning our wheels and spending way more time than we should on items of very low safety significance

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because that creates frustration, adds to regulatory uncertainty, causes unnecessary delays, and increases the loss of precious time and resources for everyone, including us.

We are all today, we are all being called on to be more efficient, me as chairman, the Commissioners and the Commission, and you. Again, this is an opportunity to show that you got this. We got this. This is the time and the opportunity to demonstrate that we can do what we've been asked and challenged to do. We have the opportunity right now to show everyone including ourselves that we got this. We need to and we can align better internally in every area to reach conclusions sooner and make the concurrence process work better, especially when the technical staff has determined that from a safety perspective we've met the adequate protection strike zone. That's critically important now when the Congress and the Administration are continually asking for us to innovate and become more efficient in all that we do while always keeping our eyes on our North Star, our safety mission.

Again, where safety is not the issue, we need to find ways to solution sooner and allow the regulatory process to move forward and come to conclusion. We have to find ways around becoming roadblocks to ourselves. Again, you got this. I just know it. We got this, and quite honestly it's time to show it.

It's important for those outside of our walls to know

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that the NRC has been making positive changes and, as a result of the ADVANCE Act, continues to make improvements, too. Here's an example: This is a great slide. It's from our Division of Advanced Reactors and Non-Power Production and Utilization Facilities, more fondly referred to as DANU. And with a title like that, I guess you know why people prefer to say DANU, too.

I had the names removed from the first column, but numbers in the column to show you how many developers and potential applicants we are actually dealing with inside the NRC at the moment. Twenty-two. Only 3 of 22 on this list have applications that are active before us. And those are publicly known: NuScale, Kairos, and TerraPower. These three active applicants are good news stories and are either on the road to being licensed soon or ahead of schedule. The Advanced Reactor Team's goal is to stay on or ahead of the schedule that they're on with these reviews until they're through the regulatory process.

The rest of the designers and potential applicants on the list, 19 of them, don't have an application before us yet. But as you can see from the graph, a waterfall of applications is expected in the next couple of years. And we have to be ready for them.

Now here's another graph. And it's the same team. And it's more proof that the need for and desire for advanced and small reactors and microreactors is real. This graph is a running

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list which is added to almost daily of designers, utilities, universities, and companies, 15 of them so far, who have announced plans to build or locate an advanced design of some type but have not yet begun engaging with the NRC. These are the only ones that we currently know about. I'm sure there are more. With all this activity the DANU team, which is led by DANU's Division Director Jeremy Bowen, along with the leadership of Greg Bowman, the Deputy Director for reactors within NRR, is leading others across the agency in preparing for the future. They have identified what they will be needing in the way of reviewers going forward and have a plan to find and train the people they will need to do the job that's in front of them. They're already showing and proving that they got this. And theirs is a success story that the rest of the agency can emulate.

In closing, let me state the obvious: Sometimes change is hard, but change happens every day. Staying put, doing things the same old way or frozen in fear because of change is a recipe for failure. Even the late, great Will Rogers once noted that, quote, if you're on the right track, if you just sit there, you'll get run over, end quote. In both cases time and opportunity will pass you by and the cost to you will be great.

We have an opportunity before us right now to flip the script, change the dialogue to show that -- show everybody what we can do and be a part of the solution to meet the energy needs of

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the United States and the world through advancing our nation's common defense and security, by efficiently enabling the safe use and deployment of nuclear energy technologies. I don't just believe this is possible. I believe in you to get the job done. After all, you're the NRC. And I know you got this. We got this.

God bless each of you and thank you for your kind attention this morning.

MS. DUDES: Fantastic job, sir.

CHAIRMAN WRIGHT: Oh, thank you.

MS. DUDES: All right. So here we are. So we have a couple of questions. Online or in the room, if you have questions, please send them in and we will look at it.

But I thank you for the video, I thank you for the speech, I thank you for your inspiration as our chairman. And you talked about a lot of things that we did in 2024. We accomplished the mission statement rewrite, which was fantastic. So when you think about 2025 and where we are today and the rest of the year, where are your priorities? I know you put up our waterfall chart, but is there some priorities surrounding efficiency that you're thinking about?

CHAIRMAN WRIGHT: Well, so first off, I hope you all enjoyed the video. It was a lot of fun to put that together. And we tried to -- I wanted to keep the message as simple as I could so that it would be able to -- people could identify with it.

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For me the initial things were the three things that I mentioned as soon as I got here: the people are first, our safety mission is second, and then the ADVANCE Act was third, and all things ADVANCE Act.

I mean, right now the Administration, the Congress are pretty aligned on everything, right? And it's more than bipartisan. Okay? I mean, it's -- if you don't think it's real, let me tell you it's real. And we're positioned to do some good things. I mean, we were already going down the road of trying to encourage our people to think outside of the box and to do things differently to try to -- just to become more efficient to meet the mission in everything that they do and in every -- from me on down.

I think with the new mission statement it gives us an opportunity to drive a message through the guidance that we're developing, that we're asked to by the Congress, to message that all the way down to the security guards at the gate, right? Everybody's a part of the body. Everybody has a part in this. And so it's important that we identify and -- what our culture -- what we want it to be and that we move that way. And everybody is going to have to move in the same direction. And some will be slower than others. Although we're a small agency we still have a lot of people.

And so as Chairman, I need to lead from the top and the Commission needs to lead as well and put people in positions

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that are people who will think outside the box, like you, right, who do things and are unafraid to challenge the way things have been done, right? If we can find a better way and still maintain that safety strike zone, we should -- I think everything's on the table, right? And so I think that's what I want to try to help foster, you know?

MS. DUDES: Fantastic. And I thank you for the strike zone. As a regional administrator I used to always say, well, we're just -- we're calling balls and strikes, right? We're not going to get involved beyond that. So it's a great continuation of that analogy.

I have a question here that efficiency is a key word. How do you foresee AI playing a role in making the NRC a more efficient regulator?

CHAIRMAN WRIGHT: Well, I mean, we've got the strategic plan. And I know that there's been some discussion. One of the things that wasn't -- when that -- when we did that strategic plan, I mean, AI really -- I mean, it's exploded since we did that, right?

So I think it's early. I think we have great potential to make things a whole lot faster within the agency using that tool, but we got to use it smart, right? And it's going to take people a whole lot smarter than me to understand everything that it can do, but it's going to be our job from the Commission level

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to put policies in effect that are going to be protective of the things that it needs to protect, but at the same time encourage the use and further efficiency and forward-leaning of the agency, right?

MS. DUDES: Perfect. So another question --

CHAIRMAN WRIGHT: Can I mention something else --

MS. DUDES: Yes.

CHAIRMAN WRIGHT: -- because you were thinking about my priorities and it -- this just dawned on me. I have a former public utility regulator background. I was a public utility commissioner in South Carolina. And one of the things that just has -- that just I don't understand is why do we, the NRC, need to know what an applicant, a utility, a licensee -- what their need for power is, right? If it's a utility company and their board rooms decides that they need to build something, they know they need the power. Sounds like to me that's more of a public utility function than an NRC function, right?

And then using that same premise, the fact that -- and they also have to tell us that they've looked at alternative siting. And I don't understand that either. Again, if the site they're looking at meets what they want and they've got that reasonable assurance finding, end of story. But that takes a lot of time in that environmental review. And we are already seeing

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gains on the safety within the agency. We need to see the same kind of gains on the environmental side, right, because you -- why should we finish a safety review a year earlier and still got to sit back waiting for an environmental review, right? So we've got to find a way to calibrate that better and get it down faster. And I know we can do that. I know we can do it.

MS. DUDES: Absolutely. And I thank you for that. And there are so many questions coming in for you and I -- we won't be able to get to all of them, but I think this is good because you have such an incredible focus on people, always have from the day I met you.

So with the increase in expected workload from advanced reactor applicants how can the NRC bring in top talent to conduct these novel reviews?

CHAIRMAN WRIGHT: Well, the ADVANCE Act has already given us a tool. We have direct higher authority in the way we can go after specialized people if we need it. But we also have our authorities already that we haven't really utilized the way we should or could. And I think that we're going to have the ability to do that. I'm grateful to have support of people like Senator Capito who will be coming up here in a minute and others in the Congress who are -- who understand what it is that we do and that we -- they're -- we got to have certain types of skills in the NRC to get the job done that they're asking us to do on a domestic and

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global scale.

So we have the -- we've got -- they have our back, right, but we have to -- we got to show them that we got this, right?

MS. DUDES: Absolutely. All right. I think we have time for one short question. There's quite a few really about the environment that we're in and people. And so I think we'll do this one.

Given the focus on people --

CHAIRMAN WRIGHT: Yes.

MS. DUDES: -- you're in particular focused on people, what is the Commission doing to retain staff during this time of rapid change in policy?

CHAIRMAN WRIGHT: Well, first off, as I mentioned earlier, the NRC is a great place to work. It's a great place to connect and grow. And we've shrunk from an FTE standpoint in the last 10 years down to almost a generational low from like 1976, potentially. And we need to be sure that we're keeping the right people.

Now having said that, we all know that the agency over the -- in the last four or five years we learned that they were pretty old by comparison to people under 30, right? A lot of people close to the age they could retire or could think about retiring. So we were out of balance there. And we're trying to

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figure that out, how to get people in that we need. And the NRAN Program and everything has been very good. There's been an intentional focus on that, and it's been working. But people are still going to -- they're still going to retire. We're still going to lose talent.

What we really need to be able to do is mentor those younger people who are coming and build our employees from the ground up rather than have to go outside of the agency and poach them from other agency or something. A homegrown product is best. And they will be passionate about what they do because they're here for that reason, right? And the more they learn, the more they could contribute early.

And we're going to need the NRANers and people who have been here five years or less to start stepping up. We're going to be asking them to get ready, right, and to contribute, because they are the future of the agency. But they've got to be mentored by the people who have been here and done that and know it. And that's what I hope we're going to be able to balance as we go forward.

We may need some help from Congress and others, but I committed to them in my -- I've been going up on the Hill meeting people. If we've got an issue or a problem, I'm going to let them know about it and ask for their help. And I believe they will help us.

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MS. DUDES: Fantastic. Well, that is all the time we have, sir. Thank you so much for the video and your wonderful speech.

CHAIRMAN WRIGHT: Thank you.

MS. DUDES: Appreciate it.

CHAIRMAN WRIGHT: Thank you. Bye.

(Whereupon, the above-entitled matter went off the record at 9:01 a.m.)

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