

7 July 2025

Honorable Shelley Moore Capito
Chair of the U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works
Honorable Sheldon Whitehouse
Ranking Member of the U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works

Honorable Brett Guthrie
Chair of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce
Honorable Frank Pallone
Ranking Member of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce

Subject: **The Importance of Maintaining Nuclear Safety while Expanding the Nation's Nuclear Energy Program**

The undersigned are a former Chairman of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission and a former Commissioner. Their views are supported by numerous former senior nuclear regulators (listed below) responsible for regulating nuclear reactors and radiation safety. We urge the Congress to ensure that the Trump administration gives clear priority to nuclear safety as it seeks to increase the nation's nuclear energy capacity 300% by 2050. Recent executive orders propose significant changes in regulatory processes, an 18-month wholesale revision of safety regulations, and shortening schedules for new reactor reviews while at the same time suggesting downsizing the NRC. These changes would be overseen by the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) and Office of Management and Budget (OMB). While these orders mention safety, their primary focus appears to be reducing regulation and accelerating licensing.

Successful expansion of nuclear energy demands an unwavering commitment to safety, driven by independent and unbiased safety assessments. Also essential is a regulatory process that is supported by the public and that is clear and predictable to the nuclear industry. One significant nuclear safety event could derail the entire effort as was seen after the Three Mile Island accident which set back the industry for years due to loss of public support. Maintaining that support requires adhering to the NRC's five principles of good regulation: independence, openness, efficiency, clarity, and reliability. A commitment to nuclear safety and adherence to these principles have resulted in the U.S. safely maintaining the largest fleet of nuclear reactors in the world and the safety standards the international nuclear community strives to meet.

Transforming the nuclear energy program on such an ambitious schedule is complex and carries inherent risks. While we support increased NRC efficiency, great care must be taken in streamlining licensing and regulatory processes to preclude erosion of nuclear safety standards. The involvement of OMB and DOGE, lacking substantial nuclear regulatory expertise, is concerning as their focus should be limited to financial and organizational matters. If directing safety requirements, they would be in direct conflict with the Atomic Energy Act and related legislation that gives the NRC the sole authority to establish safety requirements.

For the revised nuclear energy framework to deliver reliable power, clear guidance on safety is paramount, avoiding any mixed messages that prioritize speed over safety. There are rarely

second chances in the nuclear arena; the program cannot succeed without being fundamentally safe. Nuclear safety, not regulatory acceleration, must be the bedrock of this effort.

As a final comment, we note that the Energy Reorganization Act of 1974 (ERA) established a process for maintaining the full Commission to support making important policy changes. Contrary to the ERA process, Chairman Hanson was recently removed before his term was up without the necessary finding of inefficiency, neglect of duty, or malfeasance in office. This action undermines the independence of the Commission's safety judgement and the predictability of the regulatory process. In the end, this type of action will adversely impact the ability of the Commission to effectively and safely implement desired regulatory improvements.

In sum, the Trump administration's objective will fail if it does not maintain a healthy nuclear safety culture with nuclear safety as its highest priority and adhere to the principles of good regulation. These are critical for operational success and preserving the U.S.'s world-class reputation.

Respectfully,



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Former Chairman
U. S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission



William C. Ostendorff
Former Commissioner
U. S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission

cc:

Chairman David Wright, NRC
Commissioner Annie Caputo, NRC
Commissioner Bradley Crowell, NRC
Commissioner Matthew Marzano, NRC
Director Russell Vought, OMB

The individuals listed below are former senior nuclear regulators responsible for regulating nuclear reactors and radiation safety who support this letter in the interest of nuclear safety:

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