

1 UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
2 NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
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4 38TH REGULATORY INFORMATION CONFERENCE (RIC)
5 + + + + +
6 OPENING PLENARY SESSION
7 + + + + +
8 TUESDAY,
9 MARCH 10, 2026
10 + + + + +
11 The Opening Plenary Session convened at
12 the Bethesda North Marriott Hotel and Conference
13 Center, 5701 Marinelli Road, Rockville, Maryland and
14 via videoconference, at 8:00 a.m. EDT, the Honorable
15 Ho K. Nieh, Chairman, presiding.
16
17 PRESENT:
18 HO K. NIEH, Chairman, Nuclear Regulatory Commission
19
20 JEREMY GROOM, Acting Director, Office of Nuclear
21 Reactor Regulation, NRC
22 JOHN TAPPERT, Director, Office of Nuclear
23 Regulatory Research, NRC
24

1

2

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

3

8:00 a.m.

4

MR. GROOM: All right, good morning.

5

It's 8:00 o'clock. We are going to get started.

6

Wonderful. Thanks, everyone.

7

Well, good morning. On behalf of the

8

U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, I would like to

9

welcome you to the 38th Annual Regulatory Information

10

Conference.

11

My name is Jeremy Groom. And I am the

12

Acting Director of the NRC's Office of Nuclear

13

Reactor Regulation. With me is my co-sponsor for

14

this event, John Tappert, the Director of the NRC's

15

Office of Nuclear Regulatory Research.

16

Our teams have worked diligently over the

17

past several months to design a program to provide

18

opportunities to learn, engage and share over the

19

next three days.

20

It is hard to believe that only a year

21

has passed since the last RIC, really hard to believe.

22

This time last year, we were celebrating the NRC's

23

50th Anniversary, a milestone that reminded us of how

24

far we have come and how our mission has endured over

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1 the decades of change. And yet, in just these past
2 12 months, much has evolved so that it truly feels
3 like we are entering a new and important chapter in
4 our shared story.

5 We stand today at a pivotal moment, one
6 defined by modernization, new opportunities, and a
7 renewed sense of purpose across the entire nuclear
8 community. And that purpose is evident all around
9 us.

10 The optimism and energy flowing through
11 the NRC mirrors the enthusiasm we see across the
12 industry among all of you. And that spirit is
13 captured in this year's RIC theme, Regulation,
14 Innovation and Collaboration for a Safer Tomorrow,
15 which reminds us that progress is purposeful and that
16 we can uphold the safety as our guiding principle
17 while embracing innovation that helps move our world
18 forward.

19 I hope that you are excited as I am for
20 this year's RIC and the conversations ahead about the
21 future of nuclear.

22 But before we continue our program, we
23 would like to take a moment to honor our country. It
24 is our distinct privilege to welcome the Joint Armed

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1 Forces Color Guard from the Military District of
2 Washington to present the colors. Following this,
3 we will feature a performance of the National Anthem
4 by the NRC's own DFM Quartet, Yaira Diaz-Sanabria,
5 Jesse Carlson, Joseph Goodridge and Janine Smith, all
6 from NMSS.

7 We also want to thank Tiasha Bera for
8 providing interpretative services.

9 Please rise for the presentation of the
10 Colors followed by the singing of our National
11 Anthem.

12 (Presentation of Colors)

13 (National Anthem sung)

14 MR. TAPPERT: Okay. Please be seated.
15 Always one of my favorite parts of the RIC. Well,
16 good morning. And first I would like to take a moment
17 to recognize our distinguished former NRC
18 commissioners who are with us here today,
19 specifically, former Chairman Steve Burns, and former
20 Commissioners Dr. George Apostolakis, Jeff Baran,
21 Bill Magwood, Jeff Merrifield, and my old boss, or I
22 guess I should say my former boss, Bill Ostendorff.

23 We thank you all for your service and
24 your dedication to nuclear safety.

1 The RIC remains the largest conference
2 sponsored by the NRC. And this year, as a hybrid
3 event, we are experiencing unprecedented
4 participation, more than 3,000 participants from over
5 40 countries representing government, industry, the
6 public, international agencies and other stakeholders
7 are joining us in a meaningful dialogue focused on
8 shaping the future of our industry.

9 Guided by our theme, Regulation,
10 Innovation, Collaboration for a Safer Tomorrow, these
11 conversations reflect our commitment to our mission,
12 protecting public health and safety, delivering
13 efficient and reliable licensing oversight and
14 regulation for the benefit of society and the
15 environment while underscoring the importance of
16 collaboration across disciplines and organizations.

17 Regarding program highlights, today we
18 will first hear from NRC's chairman, Ho Nieh, and
19 then we get to demonstrate a little flexibility and
20 agility.

21 Originally, we were supposed to have The
22 Hon. Chris Wright, the Secretary of Energy, come and
23 speak with us. Due to unexpected scheduling
24 conflicts, he was unable to make that. We thought

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1 we could get him in earlier in the morning. Your
2 online programs have been updated to reflect that,
3 but he can't support that as well.

4 He did want to be here, and he did record
5 some remarks, which we will be playing at the
6 conclusion of the Chairman's speech and Q&A session.

7 Then we will go on to break and then we
8 will come back with Commissioners Wright and Bradley
9 to fill out this morning's program.

10 And tomorrow, we will hear from
11 Commissioners Matthew Marzano and Doug Weaver and
12 enjoy a fireside chat with the NRC's Executive
13 Director for Operations Mike King. And the program
14 also includes a special plenary session feature
15 Chairman Nieh, Admiral Robert Willard of the
16 Institute of Nuclear Power Operations and Maria
17 Korsnick of the Nuclear Energy Institute. And the
18 theme will be Shaping a Resilient and Innovative
19 Future for Nuclear Safety.

20 With 21 technical sessions and 15 digital
21 exhibits, there is truly something for everyone at
22 this year's RIC. From emerging topics connected to
23 Executive Order 14300 and the ADVANCE Act to the
24 guided tours of the NRC's Operation Center.

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1 During breaks, we encourage you to
2 explore the virtual exhibits available in the foyer
3 and through our online platform.

4 You also see the NRC's own Alysia Bone
5 broadcasting highlights throughout the conference
6 space. And of course, don't miss the opportunity to
7 network and connect with fellow participants. These
8 conversations are often where some of the most
9 meaningful insights emerge.

10 Before we begin, just a few additional
11 reminders. Audience participation will be fully
12 interactive. For those of you joining in person,
13 you can submit questions or take part in live polling
14 by scanning the QR code that will be displayed on the
15 screen in all sessions.

16 For our remote attendees, please use the
17 question and answer box to share your questions and
18 engage with the discussion.

19 For those of you attending in-person,
20 please display your name badge at all times and then
21 take a moment to familiarize yourself with the
22 nearest fire exits.

23 If a room reaches capacity, you will be
24 directed to another session. But don't worry, all

1 sessions are recorded and will be available on the
2 NRC website after the conference.

3 Finally, let's take a moment to recognize
4 the incredible efforts of the RIC planning
5 committees, the NRC staff, our contractor partners
6 and all the speakers who made this event possible.
7 Can we please give them a round of applause?

8 All right. With that, I am proud to
9 announce the 38th Annual Regulatory Information
10 Conference is officially underway, and we will move
11 right into our opening plenary session featuring the
12 NRC Chairman.

13 All right. I get the honor of
14 introducing the Chairman. The Hon. Ho Nieh was
15 designated as Chairman of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory
16 Commission by U.S. President Donald Trump on January
17 8, 2026. Chairman Nieh was previously sworn in as
18 an NRC commissioner in December 4, 2025, with a term
19 through 2029. He is the first former NRC resident
20 inspector to serve as an NRC commissioner.

21 Before returning to the NRC, Chairman
22 Nieh served as an officer at Southern Nuclear. He
23 brings more than 20 years of NRC experience to the
24 Commission, including serving as the Director of the

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1 Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation, where he led
2 reactor safety licensing and oversight for operating
3 new reactors.

4 He has also held senior leadership roles
5 internationally and across the nuclear industry,
6 including with the Institute of Nuclear Power
7 Operators. Chairman Nieh holds engineering and
8 business degrees and completed executive education at
9 the Harvard Kennedy School. He has also completed
10 the INPO Senior Nuclear Plant Manager Program.

11 Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in
12 welcoming Chairman Nieh.

13 CHAIRMAN NIEH: Well, good morning,
14 ladies and gentlemen. That DFM Quartet was pretty
15 awesome, Jeremy and John. I thought they would have
16 had a different name like Core Four or Prompt Neutrons
17 or something like that. But I think DFM Quartet
18 works.

19 On behalf of the United States Nuclear
20 Regulatory Commission, it is my distinct honor to
21 welcome you all to the 2026 Regulatory Information
22 Conference. And as already mentioned, we were really
23 hoping to have United States Secretary of Energy
24 Chris Wright join us today. But there is a lot

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1 happening in the world. And unfortunately, his time
2 has been taken away from us, but he did record a video
3 message that we will be showing later on. He
4 recorded it last night -- actually, he recorded it
5 this morning. He arrived back into the DC area after
6 midnight. So we are really gracious that he had done
7 that for us here.

8 Let me acknowledge our international
9 colleagues who traveled here today. Your presence
10 reflects the strength of global cooperation and
11 nuclear safety regulation. And I would also like to
12 recognize former members of the Commission who are
13 here today, former Chairman Burns, former
14 Commissioner Baran, Caputo, Bill Magwood, Jeff
15 Merrifield, George Apostolakis, Bill Ostendorff, who
16 is also my former boss as well. Thank you so much
17 for your continued interest in the NRC's safety
18 mission.

19 I also want to extend my welcome to our
20 federal and state partners, congressional staff,
21 industry leaders, public interest organizations and
22 all stakeholders engaged in the NRC's work.

23 I want to take a moment to appreciate my
24 fellow commissioners David Wright and Bradley

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1 Crowell, Matt Marzano and Doug Weaver. It is an
2 honor to serve alongside you.

3 This current Commission, while
4 relatively new, is at full strength. And I believe
5 we are operating collegially, thoughtfully and in a
6 timely manner to deliver sound policy and
7 organizational direction to this Agency.

8 I want to add my thanks to the NRC staff
9 who organized this year's RIC. Every year they put
10 together an engaging program that benefits nuclear
11 safety, regulatory cooperation at home and abroad.
12 And having organized this event in the past, I know
13 firsthand how much work goes into it. And I know
14 they are all looking forward to getting good night's
15 sleep next weekend.

16 For decades, the RIC has been a forum for
17 transparency, technical exchange, networking and
18 accountability to the public. And this year, it
19 comes at a pivotal time. We stand at a defining
20 moment for the NRC and for nuclear energy in America.
21 This is an exciting time for nuclear safety
22 regulation in the United States and around the world.

23 In America, you all know electricity
24 demand is rising sharply due to artificial

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1 intelligence, data centers, and industrial growth.
2 Nuclear energy is seen as essential to our energy
3 security. This is evident in the actions of
4 President Trump, the bipartisan support from
5 Congress, the investment from the finance community
6 and the growing public support for nuclear power.

7 In this context, the NRC's role as
8 America's independent nuclear safety regulator is
9 vitally important. Executive Order 14300 and the
10 ADVANCE Act have provided clear direction. The NRC
11 is making major structural changes to how we license
12 and oversee nuclear facilities in America.

13 And let me say this clearly, the NRC will
14 not be an impediment to nuclear energy innovation.
15 A new NRC has emerged, one that enables and
16 accelerates safe and secure use of nuclear
17 technology.

18 The NRC's foundation of technical
19 expertise, independence, commitment to the public
20 remains solid. And we are building on that
21 foundation to deliver our safety decisions with
22 discipline, efficiency and speed.

23 As already mentioned, this is a pivotal
24 moment. And this pivotal moment is one of the

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1 reasons I decided to come back to the NRC. Nuclear
2 energy has been a part of my life for a very long
3 time from when I was a child. My father was a nuclear
4 welder, and he steered my interest toward this field.

5 I want to share a quick story. My father
6 and I, we share the same name. And I remember many
7 years ago, I was getting my dosimetry at a nuclear
8 power plant. And the technician was looking at the
9 information on her screen. And she looked at me and
10 said, "you don't look like you are 65 years old." I
11 was only in my early 40s at the time, so I just took
12 that as a huge compliment and said thank you.

13 That memory has stayed with me, though.
14 Because our work in nuclear energy, it spans
15 generations. The decisions we make today build on
16 those before us. And they shape what the next
17 generation will inherit.

18 Some of you know I previously served at
19 the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. I came back
20 because I believe deeply in the NRC's safety mission.
21 And I believe in the NRC staff.

22 I have been back at the NRC just over
23 three months. And let me share with you some of my
24 early observations about things I believe are the

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1 same at the NRC and some things I believe that are
2 different since I left the Agency five years ago.

3 Let's start with what is the same. First
4 and foremost, safety is our top priority, full stop.
5 We exist to protect public health and safety and the
6 common defense and security. The NRC is not
7 sacrificing safety for speed. The NRC is not a
8 rubberstamp. We never have been, and we never will
9 be.

10 Second, our independence is firm and
11 enduring. We make and we own our regulatory
12 decisions and findings. But independence does not
13 mean isolation. We work with our federal partners
14 and like other executive branch agencies, we follow
15 government-wide policies and practices. And when it
16 comes to achieving the nation's energy goals, NRC is
17 an integral part of Team USA.

18 And third, our people remain our greatest
19 strength. Every day the dedicated men and women of
20 the NRC deliver on a mission that is essential to the
21 public's trust and confidence in nuclear
22 technologies. And we must increase our efforts to
23 recruit, retain, and develop our people.

24 And among the dedicated staff of the NRC,

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1 are my office teammates who I want to take a moment
2 to recognize. They are all gathered in this row
3 today here. Raise your hands, guys.

4 Now the Chairman's office has just a few
5 more staff than other commissioners, so I won't read
6 the roster. But I will share that my chief of staff,
7 Jessica Bielecki, had told me when our team was
8 announced she had heard they were nicknamed the
9 Avengers. And I think that is a great compliment to
10 your talent. So thank you, team, so much. I am
11 really grateful for all of your support.

12 So what has changed? Here are three
13 things that I believe are different since I left the
14 Agency five years ago.

15 First, the NRC now operates under a new
16 mission that emphasized enabling alongside safety.
17 And many more staff have embraced this enabling
18 concept than when I was last here at the NRC.

19 Enabling in the nuclear regulatory
20 context is a principled approach in how we apply our
21 authorities to achieve national goals and benefits
22 from the safe and secure use of nuclear technologies.
23 And I would like to say a little more about what I
24 believe regulatory enabling is and what it is not.

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1 Enabling is aligning our regulatory
2 approaches with actual risks and operational needs.
3 It is not arbitrarily lowering our standards for what
4 is safe.

5 Enabling is anticipating future needs and
6 adjusting our frameworks. It is not force fitting
7 new technologies into the status quo.

8 Enabling is adding regulatory
9 flexibility where safety is maintained. It is not
10 preserving longstanding constraints that no longer
11 provide a safety benefit.

12 Enabling is a mindset. It is not a
13 shortcut. It is not a compromise. It is how we
14 fulfill our commitment to the public in an ever-
15 changing world.

16 The second difference, the NRC's
17 leadership team is more aligned than when I was here
18 last. I give a lot of credit to our EDO Mike King
19 for achieving this alignment. While many of our
20 leaders are new to their roles, their alignment has
21 produced meaningful results in a very short period of
22 time.

23 We still have work to do in sustaining
24 this alignment and sustaining the excellence in our

1 performance. And I will touch on that a little
2 later.

3 The third difference, the NRC's
4 interagency coordination is more visible and
5 substantive than before. This greater coordination
6 with our interagency partners has brought new
7 thinking, innovative ideas to the NRC in how we can
8 fulfill our mission to achieve our national energy
9 goals.

10 This greater coordination strengthens
11 our government. Taken together, these continuities
12 and these differences have produced impressive
13 results. And this is the part I have been waiting
14 for, to share with you the incredible accomplishments
15 of the NRC staff.

16 Since the last RIC, we prepared 18
17 Executive Order 14300 draft rulemakings. One has
18 already been published for public comment and several
19 more will be published for comment in the coming
20 weeks. A lot of credit to the REFS organization
21 there. I am looking at Jake. Thank you so much,
22 Team, for everything you have done there.

23 We finalized Part 53. The first of a
24 kind, risk-informed technology inclusive, regulatory

1 framework. This will be published very, very soon,
2 final rule.

3 We approved the construction permit for
4 a non-light water advanced reactor, TerraPower's
5 Kemmerer Unit 1 facility, the first in decades.

6 We approved a restart pathway for a
7 permanently shut down reactor, Palisades. And we
8 have a couple more under review.

9 We renewed the licenses of 13 operating
10 reactors. We accelerated fuel cycle facility
11 licensing, TRISO-X. We approved innovative
12 technologies. And we launched a regulatory framework
13 for fission technologies.

14 Ladies and gentlemen, this is what an
15 enabling regulator looks like.

16 These results are not by accident. They
17 reflect an intentional shift in how we do business.
18 There is not enough time in my session to cover every
19 accomplishment across every program at the Agency,
20 but know this. The entire Agency is pulling in this
21 direction. And it is really impressive to be here
22 for that.

23 This includes our regional and resident
24 inspectors, who continue to ensure the safety and

1 security of our nuclear technologies across the
2 country.

3 Some of you may have read the pending
4 changes to the NRC's reactor oversight process. The
5 proposed reductions in the NRC's inspection program
6 reflect the high levels of safety and security across
7 the entire operating fleet in America. They also
8 reflect the strategic rebalancing of Agency
9 priorities to accelerate the safe and secure
10 deployment of new reactors and expand the capacity of
11 existing ones.

12 I assure everyone in this room and the
13 American public that our oversight will remain
14 strong. I continue to support our regional and
15 resident inspectors. And I continue to support risk-
16 informed inspection where it is needed.

17 We are making a major change through all
18 our core business functions, rulemaking, licensing,
19 and inspection. This is not incremental change. The
20 frameworks that we are developing today will set the
21 standards for nuclear safety regulations for decades
22 to come in America. And what we do here will
23 influence regulatory approaches around the world.

24 This is the kind of work that defines

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1 institutions. Few public servants ever get the
2 chance to redesign an entire regulatory system. We
3 have that opportunity now, once in a career moment
4 for the entire agency.

5 And I know that we will be successful.
6 Our success will ensure safe and secure use of nuclear
7 energy in America for generations. And I know we
8 will be successful because I have confidence in the
9 dedication and competence of the NRC staff.

10 To meet this moment, I am focusing the
11 Agency on three priorities as chairman. The first
12 priority, core mission delivery with safety,
13 efficiency and speed.

14 Safety is our top priority. It has
15 already been said. Understanding what truly drives
16 safety is something I learned very in my NRC career.
17 I will share another quick story.

18 During the first few weeks on the job as
19 a brand-new NRC resident inspector, a senior
20 inspector took me on a plant tour. And he said
21 something to me that has stayed with me my entire
22 career.

23 Along the way, he said we can find
24 violations of NRC requirements. There are some that

1 we really care about, and there are others that do
2 not require a lot of our time.

3 That statement taught me two lessons.
4 First, not all regulatory issues are equal. Second,
5 as regulators, we can choose where we spend our time
6 and where we compel licensees to spend theirs.

7 Those lessons are at the heart of risk-
8 informed regulation, focusing on what matters most to
9 safety and security. As we implement the ADVANCE Act
10 and deliver on the Executive Order 14300 rulemakings,
11 we will concentrate our energy on what matters most
12 for safety and security.

13 We will reduce unnecessary conservatisms
14 that do not impact safety. We will eliminate work
15 that does not materially contribute to mission
16 outcomes. And we will apply risk-informed
17 performance-based approaches across the entire
18 agency.

19 Safety and timeliness are not mutually
20 exclusive. We must do both. And we do both by not
21 cutting corners or taking shortcuts, but by reducing
22 the unnecessary things that slow us down and focusing
23 on what is most important.

24 The second priority, leadership and

1 operational excellence. The NRC's regulatory
2 performance will not improve on its own. It improves
3 when leaders are aligned and accountable. Direction
4 becomes clear. Outcomes are defined. Progress is
5 monitored. Teamwork becomes effective and results
6 have ownership.

7 I have directed our EDO Mike King to
8 implement a more coherent NRC management model along
9 with complimentary leadership behaviors. When
10 leaders are aligned on what excellence looks like,
11 the staff can execute with confidence. And when
12 expectations for excellence are clear, progress
13 follows.

14 A discipline management model is not
15 about adding bureaucracy. It is about removing
16 friction and focusing on excellent outcomes. Our
17 goal here is to ingrain an NRC management model in
18 leadership behaviors in our day-to-day activities so
19 they become enduring elements of how we do work long
20 after all of us in this room are gone.

21 The third priority, sustaining our
22 performance through continuance improvement. Strong
23 organizations don't stand still. They learn. They
24 adjust. They invest in their people. They question

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1 themselves. They ask, why are we doing this? Why
2 are we doing it this way? What can we learn from our
3 experiences?

4 Continuous improvement is not criticism
5 of the past. It is essential for how we fulfill our
6 mission. It is how we stay relevant. It is
7 commitment to getting better every day. It is a
8 mindset that today will be better than yesterday and
9 tomorrow will be better than today.

10 To strengthen NRC's culture of continuous
11 improvement, we will be leveraging and institute a
12 nuclear power operations document that is used across
13 the industry to sustain high levels of performance.
14 Many of you in this room are probably familiar with
15 this.

16 This INPO 19-003 describes values that
17 will help NRC sustain its performance for the long
18 term, and it will help us evolve in step in the future
19 as changes occur with the nuclear energy landscape.

20 Let me close, come back to where I
21 started. This is an exciting time for nuclear safety
22 regulation in the United States and around the world.
23 The NRC has entered an era of major reform where we
24 are ensuring our frameworks are credible, predictable

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1 and aligned with our national energy needs.

2 We are strengthening our leadership
3 alignment, sharpening our operational discipline and
4 creating a culture of continuous improvement that
5 must outlast any one chairman or commission.

6 These reforms succeed only if safety and
7 security performance remain strong. As an enabling
8 regulator, the NRC is not lowering its standards for
9 high performance from ourselves and from those we
10 regulate.

11 Sustained high levels of safety and
12 security across the entire industry is essential for
13 the public's trust and confidence in nuclear
14 technologies, and it is essential for America to
15 achieve its ambitions for nuclear energy.

16 Going forward, here is what the American
17 people can expect from the NRC. Safety first,
18 independence always, discipline, efficiency and
19 timeliness in everything we do.

20 Thank you so much for your attention.
21 Thank you for much for being here. I wish you a
22 fantastic conference for the rest of the week. I
23 look forward to your questions.

24 MR. TAPPERT: Thank you, Chairman.

1 CHAIRMAN NIEH: You're welcome.

2 MR. GROOM: Well, thank you, sir. That
3 was just a great opening and a great way to start the
4 RIC. We have already got some questions rolling in.
5 And I guess I would just like to start with maybe a
6 perspective from you.

7 The makeup of the Commission has changed
8 in the last six months, both its membership and, you
9 know, the makeup in general. Can you just maybe
10 offer your perspective on how you think the
11 Commission is operating right now?

12 CHAIRMAN NIEH: Oh, absolutely. So
13 we'll just cut right to the chase here.

14 So, as I mentioned, I have been back at
15 the Commission for three months. And I have to say
16 that I am so proud to work alongside these
17 commissioners. I feel that our level of engagement
18 and trust with each other is fantastic. You know,
19 the rapport that we built was established very
20 quickly.

21 And to put it into perspective, this
22 Commission has such a high volume of work on its
23 plate, the pace at which we are working to deliver
24 thoughtful decisions is something that I have never

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1 seen in my almost 24 years at the NRC.

2 And I think that this Commission, we are
3 looking at things thoughtfully. We have different
4 perspectives on the substance of policy. However, I
5 think we are all aligned for achieving the NRC's
6 success in this moment with all the work that we have
7 and the reforms that we are making.

8 So I feel this Commission is working
9 extremely well. In fact, I am going to submit that
10 question on the phone to my colleagues later to see
11 what they have to say.

12 But this is what I think. I am really
13 happy to work with all four other members of the
14 Commission. And I think we are working really well,
15 and we are delivering votes -- you have seen it. We
16 are producing very thoughtful votes in extraordinary
17 periods of time here in terms of the volume and
18 quantity of work that we are dealing with here.

19 MR. GROOM: Yes, sir. Yeah, we have
20 certainly put a lot on your plates. But the cadence
21 and the quality of the votes we receive have really
22 meant a lot to the staff. So thank you for that and
23 all of our commissioners.

24 So in your opening, sir, you mentioned

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1 the rulemakings. And it has been a big focus for the
2 NRC for, you know, really the last year. Can you
3 just maybe give your perspective on where we are at
4 with the EO 14300 rulemakings and what they will bring
5 to the table when they are finished?

6 CHAIRMAN NIEH: Absolutely. For those
7 in the room, the NRC has about 500 full-time
8 equivalents developing these rules. And they have
9 been working on these rules since the Executive Order
10 14300 was issued last May.

11 It is an extraordinary amount of work.
12 And I, again, cannot express enough my deep
13 appreciation for the staff of the NRC that are
14 delivering these products.

15 I didn't know what to expect when I was
16 coming back and reviewing these rules. Some of these
17 rules are 800, 900 pages of background material to
18 read. But what I have seen, these rules are high
19 quality. They are focused on what is most important
20 for safety and security. And I really look forward
21 to showing these rules to the public so they can
22 comment on them.

23 And I think when it comes to accelerating
24 the deployment of new technologies, what I am seeing

1 in these rules, NRC now has significant optionality
2 for applicants in how pursue licensing of nuclear
3 technology.

4 We have Part 50, Part 52. We are
5 finalizing Part 53. There is a Part 57 that is coming
6 out for micro-reactor licensing. So, depending on
7 your use case, your deployment model, the maturity of
8 the design, your financing, there are several options
9 that will be available for American technologies to
10 be licensed in the United States.

11 MR. GROOM: Great. Thank you for that,
12 sir. Yeah, we are very excited about the rules. And
13 as you mentioned in your opening, they are going to
14 be available to the public very, very soon.

15 So, the rules obviously offer a lot of
16 different frameworks, and there is going to be
17 options in the future.

18 I would like to switch a little bit
19 about, you know, what we see in terms of development.
20 And, you know, the NRC in the past has devoted a lot
21 of resources to a nuclear renaissance that never
22 really materialized.

23 It seems that we may be doing this again.
24 We are again standing up a new Office of Advanced

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1 Reactors. We are preparing for a wave of
2 applications of new applicants. What is different
3 this time?

4 CHAIRMAN NIEH: So, what is different
5 this time? I was actually here in 2004, 2005 when
6 NRR split into NRR and NRO. And I was here in 2019
7 when those two offices came together. And now I find
8 myself here in 2026, what's old is new again. We are
9 separating the organizations to strategically focus
10 on advanced reactors. I believe that is the right
11 thing to do for the organizational structure.

12 What I think is different, back in the
13 '04, '05 time frame, that renaissance you referred
14 to, we hired a lot of people. We put more resources
15 into the work that we were doing, which was
16 appropriate to do. Three White Flint is a hallmark
17 to that renaissance. And obviously, we know what
18 happened there.

19 What I think is different now, we are
20 asking ourselves how do we work smarter, not harder?
21 I mean, obviously, we have to hire a lot of people.
22 We have lost a lot of staff at this Agency. But the
23 things that I see different are things that I
24 mentioned in my speech, the leadership alignment,

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1 right? Looking at what enabling regulation is. And
2 it's working smarter, not harder.

3 What are the things that are slowing us
4 down that do not impact safety, our safety decisions,
5 and how do we remove those things from the regulatory
6 processes? So, to me that's a huge difference. I
7 am not saying that didn't happen in '04, '05 time
8 frame. But the degree that which is happening now,
9 so different than before.

10 MR. GROOM: Great. Thank you for that.
11 So, in my opening, I introduced you and provided some
12 of your background and your time at Southern.

13 We have a question from the online
14 platform. Talk a little bit about your experience
15 in the industry both at Southern Company and then
16 your time at INPO and how that influenced maybe the
17 direction and the priorities you have set for the
18 Agency, and, you know, how you are taking those
19 experiences to kind of learn from and lead us in this
20 pivotal moment for our Agency?

21 CHAIRMAN NIEH: Sure. I am glad that
22 somebody paid attention to the priorities. You know,
23 when I was walking over this morning, an NRC person
24 asked me what kind of socks I was wearing because

1 that is all she remembered from the last time I was
2 on this stage. So, I am glad you paid attention.

3 MR. GROOM: I went straight blue this
4 time.

5 CHAIRMAN NIEH: Me, too. It was too dark
6 in the morning to pick something out. And I didn't
7 want to wake my wife up. But what was the question
8 again? Oh, about my experience --

9 MR. GROOM: Your experience at Southern
10 and INPO.

11 CHAIRMAN NIEH: You know, it really
12 reflects heavily in my remarks here. You know the
13 thing that I found to be an incredible about this
14 industry is that these organizations that are running
15 the operating reactors in the United States at these
16 high levels of safety and security performance, they
17 are incredibly high performing organizations.

18 Their management models are disciplined.
19 They execute consistently. And the thing that stood
20 out to me the most was the leadership alignment. It
21 blew me away when I was working at Southern, how
22 aligned the leaders are and how they were able to
23 engage the workforce and align that vision and
24 direction for their companies throughout the entire

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1 organization to achieve results.

2 My experience at INPO was fantastic. I
3 think that the high levels of safety and security
4 that exist today -- well, INPO doesn't really focus
5 on security. But the high levels of safety that
6 exists in the operating reactors today, in my
7 opinion, would not be possible without the work of
8 INPO.

9 INPO really drives this industry to
10 perform at a high level of excellence and to continue
11 to achieve levels of excellence as new ways of working
12 evolve or new things are learned in the industry.
13 So, I really think that what they do is really
14 valuable.

15 Obviously, it influenced the priorities
16 that I am bringing to the agency to help NRC execute,
17 like, a high performing agency with the discipline of
18 how it does business as well as the eye toward
19 continuous improvement.

20 One of the things on the INPO 19003
21 pinwheel that I showed, one of the values for
22 continuous improvement is self-awareness, self-
23 correction. I think that's a strength that this
24 industry does. I think it's a strength that the NRC

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1 promotes through its inspection program, right? You
2 know, find and fix your problems. And that's what
3 that spirit is.

4 I am so grateful to have had five years
5 in the industry. I learned a lot and that's why I
6 came back. I want to pay it forward. There is a lot
7 of good stuff out there. We are not reinventing the
8 wheel on things. And these are the things that we
9 want to bring into the Agency to help us sustain our
10 performance into the future.

11 MR. GROOM: Yeah, I think some of those
12 concepts are really driving the alignment within the
13 leadership team at the NRC that you spoke about in
14 your opening.

15 So, in your opening remarks, you talk a
16 little bit about what is the same at the NRC and what
17 is different. And one of the things that you
18 mentioned that is different is our interagency
19 partnership.

20 I wonder if you could just elaborate a
21 little bit on how that's going, specifically our work
22 with DOE on some of the advanced reactor work?

23 CHAIRMAN NIEH: Yeah, well, one, I think
24 it is going great. I want to address something for

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1 folks that may not know. Last year there were
2 articles being written about NRC's independence and
3 that there was this army of people coming from the
4 Department of Energy and elsewhere in the
5 organization to, you know, work at the NRC and, you
6 know, make its decisions for the NRC. That is not
7 happening.

8 There are really not that many people
9 here at the NRC that are from the Department of
10 Energy. In fact, I think right now there is only
11 one. And the individual is not even in the building
12 all the time and has some just periodic degree of
13 coordination with our activity. So, I really want
14 to put that to rest.

15 NRC is doing its own work. Our
16 coordination with the rest of government is aimed at
17 accelerating the safe and secure deployment of
18 nuclear technology, right? This is what our country
19 needs and NRC is an integral part of Team USA. We
20 are trying to make that happen with our interagency
21 partner.

22 As far as the DOE projects, you know,
23 they are exciting, right? There is the reactor pilot
24 program. We have NRC folks assigned there to observe

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1 what is going on. We recently issued some guidance.

2 Jeremy Bowen sent some guidance out to
3 set expectations for NRC's observations. We are not
4 there to make the Department of Energy's decisions
5 for them. We are there to observe, ask questions so
6 that we can learn that knowledge and bring that back
7 into the NRC's process when those technologies are
8 mature and ready for commercial licensing through the
9 NRC's licensing process.

10 So, I feel that the interagency
11 coordination is going great. It is great. It is
12 appropriate, and it is needed for our country to be
13 successful.

14 MR. GROOM: Yeah, I would agree. Our
15 interactions have been nothing but positive. The
16 ultimate authority rests with us. But they have
17 offered a lot of valuable insights.

18 You also talked a little bit about
19 leadership and staff development in your opening.
20 You know, we have had a lot of turnover. We have got
21 folks in new leadership roles, including myself.

22 You know, what does the future look like
23 for staff development, making sure we retain and
24 attract the greatest talent to the NRC?

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1 CHAIRMAN NIEH: So, we are looking at
2 options, at how we can recruit and retain our staff
3 further. And there is a whole bunch of things that
4 we are looking at. I don't know want to get into the
5 details. But we recognize that is something we have
6 to do for the longevity of our agency.

7 When it comes to development, the EDO
8 knows this, and I have shared this with you and every
9 other senior leader that I have had a chance to talk
10 to, and this goes back to the question about what did
11 I learn from industry.

12 One thing I saw in industry that was
13 really impressive to me was how they developed their
14 people. Senior leaders in the industry are
15 personally invested in developing their people.

16 The company I worked for and other
17 companies that I was assigned to monitor through
18 INPO, they don't outsource leadership development.
19 The personally invest themselves in developing the
20 leaders.

21 That is my expectation for you, for the
22 EDO and all the directors that report to the EDO.
23 You guys and gals have to pay forward your leadership
24 strengths and learnings, things you did well, the

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1 things you could have -- the things you learned from
2 and pay that forward to the future generations. That
3 is how we instill the way we do business into our
4 workforce.

5 So I think that, to me, is an important
6 part of how we develop our agency going forward is
7 when senior leaders make a personal commitment to
8 developing others. What did you do today to develop
9 somebody else? That is where we need to be.

10 MR. GROOM: Great. Thank you for that,
11 sir.

12 A couple maybe more specific questions.
13 You mentioned oversight in your opening. And, you
14 know, we are preparing some reductions to our
15 inspection program. It is really some of the boldest
16 proposals we have had in the last 25 years since the
17 inception of the ROP.

18 You know, with those in mind, how do we
19 assure that -- assure the public the plants are safe.
20 That they have the right oversight and that, you know,
21 what we have done to reduce the amount of inspections
22 we do doesn't compromise safety?

23 CHAIRMAN NIEH: There are a lot of ways
24 for that. I think it starts with the dedication that

1 the men and women of the NRC and the regions bring to
2 their jobs.

3 I have met a lot of resident inspectors
4 over the years and regional inspectors over the
5 years, they are the most dedicated civil servants I
6 have encountered. They are sharp. They know their
7 power plants. They understand the regulatory
8 requirements.

9 Yes, we can improve in being more risk-
10 informed, of course. And again, that goes towards
11 the leadership alignment. But I think if the public
12 appreciates how competent and dedicated the NRC staff
13 are out in the inspection programs, I think that is
14 one aspect.

15 The other thing that I think is important
16 to note is that NRC inspection is one element in what
17 constitutes safety of these facilities in the United
18 States. The other elements include the robust
19 designs of these facilities. The quality controls
20 that are in place in operating these facilities. The
21 high performing organizations that run these
22 reactors. The highly qualified operators in the
23 control room that are there to handle things that
24 occur during the operation of the facility, the work

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1 of INPO.

2 This is an ecosystem for safety. The NRC
3 inspection is one part of that. It is an important
4 part of it, and it is something that we continue --
5 we will continue to do.

6 The other point that I would add onto
7 this is that the ROP is a living program. You check
8 and adjust. If we see performance going in a trend
9 that we don't believe is good for safety, we increase
10 inspections, and there are mechanisms in place to do
11 that.

12 So, it goes both ways. In my view right
13 now, performance is at a very high level of inspection
14 that I see across the NRC programs. And my opinion
15 is outsized for the level of performance. And we are
16 fixing that. It is not going to zero. We are still
17 doing inspections, right? But if the performance
18 gaps occur, then we change our inspections the other
19 way.

20 MR. GROOM: Sir, absolutely. So, we
21 received several questions about the concept of
22 openness. And, you know, in past rulemakings, the
23 NRC did extensive public outreach. But we have been
24 somewhat hampered in that in the EO 14300

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1 rulemakings.

2 Why hasn't the NRC involved the public
3 more? Will there be public meetings on the proposed
4 rules? And what steps can the NRC take in future
5 rulemakings to ensure early public involvement?

6 CHAIRMAN NIEH: So, as I mentioned in my
7 remarks, we follow the government-wide policies and
8 practices. And the current OIRA, Office of
9 Information Regulatory Affairs -- I don't know if
10 that's the exact name of it -- but this OIRA process
11 provides two opportunities for public participation
12 in the rulemaking process. It's at the beginning
13 during the draft rule stage when it's published. And
14 then it's at the end at the final rule before it goes
15 live. And that's just the way it is right now.

16 We are laying out a strategy for having
17 public meetings during the comment periods to ensure
18 that folks that are going to be affected by these
19 regulations have an opportunity to truly understand
20 what these rules are intended to accomplish and to
21 give us meaningful feedback to make sure that these
22 rules are rules that one, ensure safety and security,
23 and two, are rules that are actually going to make a
24 difference. So I think that is very important in the

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1 process.

2 So things are just different. I don't
3 know how else to say it, but they are just different
4 than what is in the past.

5 Our explanation of these rules is
6 important. So we are working on a strategy to have
7 public meetings around the rules that are going to be
8 published for comment by the NRC.

9 MR. GROOM: So we received a couple
10 questions about the NRC's influence internationally
11 across the global community. How do you think the
12 NRC's reforms that we are experiencing now under the
13 executive order and the ADVANCE Act will influence
14 regulatory authorities in other countries?

15 You know, many of them already implement
16 a fairly risk-informed and performance-based
17 regulatory framework while others are relatively
18 conservative and rigid. You know, do you have any
19 perspectives on, you know, how the NRC as a global
20 leader will influence some of our international
21 partners?

22 CHAIRMAN NIEH: I do. I do. You know,
23 I worked internationally at the IAEA over the years
24 as well as the Nuclear Energy Agency with Director

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1 General Magwood, who is here today. I have always
2 been impressed at the U.S. NRC's participation in
3 these international fora. You know, they come with
4 credibility, experience that our international
5 colleagues value, and we value their experiences as
6 well.

7 I am aware that in many other countries,
8 and Europe especially, they are experiencing similar
9 drives to be better at how they deliver their
10 licensing and regulatory decisions.

11 And I think what NRC is doing here is a
12 model. It may not be the model that is right for any
13 one particular country, but we are embarking on
14 things that I think will give us some experience on
15 whether it works or not and others can learn from
16 that. And I am very willing to share our experiences
17 as we implement some of these new licensing programs
18 and the things that we are doing in our oversight
19 programs as well.

20 I think another thing that I hear a lot
21 about in meetings that I have with external
22 stakeholders, it is important for the United States
23 to export its technologies to other parts of the
24 world, to have the United States regain energy

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1 leadership in nuclear from countries like Russia and
2 China that are proliferating their technologies.

3 So, a lot of the work that we are doing
4 here is in support of that. And that is the right
5 goal for Team USA. And countries that are
6 considering U.S. technologies, we have an incredible
7 opportunity to help influence how they approach their
8 regulatory functions and licensing and oversight.

9 So I think there is a variety of fronts
10 where the USA can play a key leadership role through
11 our continued participation in international
12 activities.

13 MR. GROOM: Great. So, we received
14 similar questions from the NRC staff. And they all
15 kind of have a similar flavor.

16 The NRC has really tried a lot of reform
17 efforts over the past 20 years. You know, when you
18 were the NRR director, we have had things like Lean
19 Six Sigma, Project AIM, Transformation and
20 Innovation, EMBARK Venture Studios.

21 You know, what's different this time? It
22 kind of feels like we are trying to do the same thing,
23 but maybe rebrand a little bit different. Why do you
24 think these latest reform initiatives within the NRC

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1 will be successful this time?

2 CHAIRMAN NIEH: That is a great question.
3 He just said basically it didn't work when I was here
4 last. Yeah, you know, what is different now is the
5 alignment and expectation that we are going to
6 reinforce the new things that we are doing.

7 Again, going back to the industry
8 experience, again, when I think about what I learned
9 in five years working for the industry, in the
10 industry, and the alignment and how things are
11 reinforced, that is what is going to be different.

12 You know, Mike King and I have talked
13 about -- there were previous instances where kind of
14 an NRC type leadership model was being developed.
15 And, you know, I asked Mike King, you know, what can
16 we learn from that?

17 And he had shared with me that, you know,
18 last time it was kind of a notebook that ended up
19 getting put on the shelves. It was not reinforced
20 as an expectation from the leaders of the Agency that
21 we are going to do business this way. That has to
22 be different.

23 So, these things that we are doing to get
24 better every day and be disciplined in how we do

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1 business, it is not the chairman. It is not the
2 Commission. It is not the EDO. It has got to be
3 really from the staff that own it. But it starts
4 with an expectation that these things that we are
5 doing are going to be ingrained in our day-to-day
6 work.

7 You go to a nuclear power plant in the
8 United States. You go to a company that operates a
9 fleet of reactors. You see what they do on their
10 walls. And I am not saying just put up a bunch of
11 pretty posters and everything is going to be great.
12 It is a day-to-day reinforcement that has to occur.
13 And that is the expectation that I want to see at the
14 Agency.

15 You create the expectation for your
16 supervisors, your individual contributors to live the
17 NRC management model and demonstrate the leadership
18 behaviors. They pay it forward to others. It's like
19 a critical reactor.

20 MR. GROOM: Infectious.

21 CHAIRMAN NIEH: Exactly.

22 MR. GROOM: Great. Well, we just have a
23 couple minutes left. We covered a lot of ground
24 here. Just in your view, kind of summing everything

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1 up, what does success look like for the NRC?

2 CHAIRMAN NIEH: Shovels in the ground.
3 That's what it looks like. We are successful,
4 licenses are issued, shovels go in the ground, and we
5 start building nuclear reactors safely and securely
6 in the United States. That, in my opinion, ladies
7 and gentlemen, that is what success looks like to me.

8 Underneath that, sustainable performance
9 in how we do business. Long after all of us in this
10 room are gone, that we continue to improve as that
11 regulatory landscape changes.

12 MR. GROOM: That's a great vision, sir.
13 Anything you would like to close with?

14 CHAIRMAN NIEH: Yes. I would like to
15 just say thank you to the dedicated men and women of
16 the NRC that continue to deliver this mission. I am
17 impressed and proud of the work that you do. I think
18 the American people should be extraordinarily proud
19 of the efforts that you all are making to become this
20 new regulatory agency that is going to help deliver
21 safe and secure nuclear technologies to the United
22 States of America.

23 It such an incredible time in nuclear
24 energy not only here but around the world in terms of

1 the moment this means for nuclear safety regulation.
2 It is just an incredible honor to just be part of
3 this moment. I mean, it is just amazing. We are all
4 in this moment together, that ecosystem I referred
5 to.

6 MR. GROOM: Yes, sir.

7 CHAIRMAN NIEH: So, we got this.

8 MR. GROOM: Wonderful. Thanks,
9 everyone. Thank you, Chairman, for a wonderful
10 opening, and we will proceed to the next program.
11 Thank you.

12 CHAIRMAN NIEH: All right.

13 SECRETARY WRIGHT: Thanks, everyone, for
14 attending this year's NRC's Annual Regulatory
15 Information Conference. I am severely disappointed
16 I am not there with you today. I was planning for a
17 long time to be at this event, meet a lot of you, and
18 share my thoughts.

19 And I want to start by saying you are
20 part of history. This is the nuclear renaissance
21 that has been talked about for years. I honestly
22 believe with the team we have got today, this is going
23 to happen.

24 Nuclear is an incredible technology that

1 burst onto the scene after World War II and became a
2 major part of the United States' electricity grid.
3 It has had bumps on the way. I don't need to go into
4 the sources of those, but we are very passionate about
5 getting our nuclear industry, the next generation
6 designs, improvements on existing reactors, life
7 extensions, we want to massively grow the energy
8 produced in the United States and around the world
9 from this fabulous technology. And that takes a
10 team.

11 At the Department of Energy, we have
12 funding from Congress. We have programs to enable
13 small companies and existing larger reactors to
14 continue to improve and grow their portfolio. And
15 we have a separate regulatory agency. And I am very
16 proud about that fact. The independence of the
17 Nuclear Regulatory Commission is critical because
18 without safety, nuclear is not going anywhere.

19 And the NRC is the world's gold standard
20 of safety. If we do it right here in the United
21 States, the rest of the world will believe in that
22 and we will take your certifications to the bank.

23 Nuclear development over the last 20
24 years abroad or 30 years has mostly been done by China

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1 and Russia. I don't think this has been great for
2 the host nations. It certainly hasn't been great for
3 the United States. We want a thriving nuclear
4 industry here in the United States and grow power
5 production here in America and also sell to our allies
6 abroad.

7 There is a big challenge in front of us.
8 But I think with Ho's leadership, with your hard work,
9 with your commitment to innovation, your commitment
10 to enabling regulation, never taking our eye off the
11 safety ball, that is central to the NRC's mission.
12 But if we can do that in a cooperative, innovative,
13 enabling way, and the DOE can stay in our lane and
14 play our role and help supply fuel and get supply
15 change reestablished in our country, help these
16 companies get going financially and technologically,
17 we have great things in front of us.

18 So sorry to not be with you today. This
19 is an exciting time to be on Team USA and to be part
20 of the nuclear renaissance. I am proud to partner
21 with you all.

22 I look forward to seeing you in person
23 next year. Sorry I couldn't be there today. Thank
24 you all so much. Let's make it happen.

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1 MR. GROOM: All right. Well, obviously,
2 we are very sorry that the Secretary could not make
3 it to this year's RIC.

4 We have a change in our program. We are
5 going on extended break until 10:30. So, this is a
6 great opportunity for some of that hallway talk and
7 some of those conversations that have a lot of great
8 engagement. And we are going to rejoin back at 10:30.
9 Thanks, everyone.

10 (Whereupon, the above-entitled matter
11 went off the record at 9:01 a.m. and resumed at 10:31
12 a.m.)

13