

WRITTEN STATEMENT
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TO THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE
JUNE 14, 2023

Chair Duncan, Ranking Member DeGette, and members of the Committee – thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

As the NRC’s newest Commissioner, I’ve had the pleasure of building positive working relationships with my fellow Commissioners. It is readily apparent that a genuine spirit of collegiality among the Commission forms the foundation for successfully overseeing the execution of the NRC’s mission with maximum effectiveness and efficiency.

Indeed, the benefits of collegiality are most fully realized when operating with the full complement of Commissioners. With five members since last August, the Commission has made progress on pivotal issues related to the existing reactor fleet while forging ahead on establishing a responsible regulatory framework to support the next generation of nuclear technologies.

Chair Hanson highlighted many of these topics in his testimony, as well as other notable recent accomplishments by the NRC, while also emphasizing the robust work schedule ahead for Fiscal Year 2024 and beyond.

The NRC plays a central role in the future viability of nuclear energy, both in the U.S. and abroad. As our nation’s regulator for the safe and secure operation of civilian nuclear technologies, the NRC is committed to fully meeting this responsibility such that the public can have confidence that all NRC licensees operate in manner that minimizes risk and maximizes safety.

Clearly, the foundational mission of the NRC must always be the uncompromising commitment to protect public health, safety and the environment; and to promote the common defense and security. However, this vital mission must be achieved using a broader lens than has traditionally been utilized at the NRC.

While the function of an independent, Commission-led agency, such as the NRC, is intentionally distinct from traditional executive branch federal agencies, Congress did not intend for independent agencies to operate in a vacuum or be immune from the inherent, collective responsibility of all US government agencies to advance the common good. Based on this bedrock principle, I believe the NRC must quickly adapt to embrace the shared responsibility of our nation's collective effort to address climate change and energy security within the context of executing the agency's statutorily defined mission.

Nuclear energy provides over half of America's carbon-free electricity and avoids more than 470 million metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions that would otherwise come from fossil fuels. This is just in the United States. Globally, the International Atomic Energy Agency estimates that nuclear energy avoids 2 gigatonnes per year of CO₂ emissions. This is roughly equivalent to displacing the energy output, and associated pollution, of over 500 coal plants. To achieve an equivalent reduction in emissions without nuclear energy would require siting, building, and operating over half a million new wind turbines.

Meanwhile, maintaining the current operating fleet of nuclear reactors and deploying new and advanced reactors is one of the very few energy options to achieve meaningful, near-term reductions in carbon pollution while serving as an important baseload power supply. These benefits, combined with the anticipated significantly enhanced safety features of newer and advanced nuclear reactors, creates the opportunity for advanced nuclear energy to be a truly game changing technology in the U.S. and beyond. However, while the potential for nuclear energy to make a meaningful and enduring contribution to reducing carbon emissions and stabilizing our energy grid is real, time is of the essence.

The NRC plays a critical role in our nation's, and indeed the world's, collective effort to meet this moment. But to be successful, the NRC must embrace a contemporary sense of purpose within the context of our statutory authority that embodies the challenges and opportunities before us.

As an essential part of this effort, the NRC must restore, build, and maintain public trust through proactive and meaningful interactions with the public, other governmental organizations, and the full spectrum of stakeholders.

The NRC must also maintain a commitment to safely regulating the full fuel cycle by asserting commensurate focus on issues from mining to waste in its regulatory decisions, oversight, and research activities. Proactive engagement on used fuel management, decommissioning, and waste disposal is critical to enhancing public confidence. Failing to do so will have the opposite effect.

I am excited by the challenge of what we can, and must, accomplish by the end of this decade. But we must get to work now and maintain this level of commitment in subsequent years to succeed. With adequate resources for the agency and under clear, consistent leadership by the Commission, I believe we can achieve our goals. And I am confident the NRC staff is up to the challenge.

The FY '24 budget request is an important next step to ensure the NRC has the resources necessary to meet this pivotal moment. Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.