



UNITED STATES NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

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Chairman Ho Nieh
(as prepared and not as presented)**

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

On behalf of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, it is my distinct pleasure to welcome you to the 2026 Regulatory Information Conference.

I am especially pleased to welcome U.S. Secretary of Energy, Chris Wright. I am looking forward to his remarks.

I also welcome our federal and state partners, Congressional staff, industry leaders, public interest organizations and all stakeholders engaged in the NRC's work.

I want to recognize our international colleagues who have traveled here. Your presence reflects the strength of global cooperation in nuclear safety regulation.

I would also like to recognize the former members of the Commission here today. We appreciate your continued interest in the NRC's safety mission.

Let me take a moment to appreciate my fellow Commissioners—David Wright, Brad Crowell, Matt Marzano and Doug Weaver. I am honored to serve alongside you. This current Commission has been working collegially, thoughtfully and in a timely manner to deliver sound policy and organizational direction to the agency.

And let me add my thanks to the NRC staff who organized this year's RIC. Every year, they deliver an engaging program that benefits nuclear safety regulation at home and abroad. Having organized this conference in the past, I know firsthand how much work goes into it—and how much they are looking forward to a good night's sleep—this weekend.

For decades, the RIC has been a forum for transparency, technical exchange, networking, and accountability to the public. This year, it comes at a pivotal time.

We stand at a defining moment for the NRC and for the future of nuclear energy in the United States. It is an exciting time for nuclear safety regulation—not only in our country, but around the world.

In America, electricity demand is rising sharply due to artificial intelligence, data centers and industrial growth. Nuclear energy is seen as essential to our energy security. This is evident in the actions of President Trump, the bipartisan support of Congress, the investment from the finance community, and the growing public support for nuclear energy.

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

Let me say this clearly: the NRC will not be an impediment to nuclear energy innovation. A new NRC has emerged—one that enables and accelerates the safe and secure deployment of nuclear technologies.

The NRC's foundation of technical expertise, independence and commitment to the public is solid. We are building on that foundation to deliver our safety decisions with discipline, efficiency and speed.

This pivotal moment is one of the reasons I chose to return to the NRC. Nuclear energy has been part of my life for a long time—from when I was a child. My father was a nuclear welder, and he steered my interest toward this field.

Let me share a quick story. My father and I share the same name. I remember many years ago, when I was getting my dosimetry at a nuclear power plant, the technician looked at the details on her computer and said to me, "You don't look like you're 65 years old." I was in my 40s at the time, so I took that as a huge compliment and said, "Thank you."

That memory stayed with me because our work in nuclear energy spans generations. The decisions we make today build on the work of those before us—and they shape what the next generation will inherit.

Many of you know I previously served at the agency. I returned because I believe deeply in the NRC's safety mission and I believe in the NRC staff. I have been back at the NRC for a little over three months. Let me share some of my early observations about what I believe remains the same at the NRC and what has changed since I left five years ago.

Let's start with what remains the same. Here are three continuities.

First and foremost, safety remains our top priority. Full stop. We exist to protect public health and safety, and the common defense and security. The NRC is not compromising safety for speed. The NRC is not a rubber stamp.

Second, our independence remains firm and enduring. We make and we own our regulatory decisions. But independence does not mean isolation. We coordinate with our federal partners, and like all executive branch agencies, we follow government-wide policies. And when it comes to achieving our national energy goals, the NRC is an integral part of Team USA.

Third, our people remain our greatest strength. Every day, the competent and dedicated NRC staff deliver on a safety mission that is essential to America's energy security and public trust in nuclear technologies. We must increase our efforts to recruit, retain and develop our people.

Among these talented NRC staff are my office teammates whom I would like to recognize. They are seated in that row over there, please raise your hands. The Chairman's office has a few more staff than other Commissioner offices, so I won't read the roster. I will share that my Chief of Staff, Jessica Bielecki, told me that when our team was announced, she heard they were nicknamed The Avengers—which I consider quite a compliment. Thank you, team, I am very grateful for your support.

So, what has changed since I was last at the NRC? Here are three differences.

First—the NRC now operates under a new mission that emphasizes enabling along with safety. Many more staff embrace this enabling concept than my last time at the NRC, when we pursued a similar vision. In the nuclear regulatory context, enabling is about principled application of our authorities to achieve national goals and benefits from the safe use of nuclear technologies.

Here is what I believe an enabling regulator is—and what it is not. Enabling is aligning our regulatory approaches with actual risks; it is not arbitrarily lowering our standards for safety. Enabling is anticipating future needs and adjusting our frameworks; it is not force-fitting new technologies into the status quo. Enabling is adding regulatory flexibilities that maintain safety; it is not preserving longstanding constraints that no longer provide a safety benefit.

Enabling is a mindset. It is not a shortcut. It is not a compromise. It is how we fulfill our safety commitment to the public in a changing world.

Second difference—the NRC leadership is more aligned than when I was last at the NRC. I give a lot of credit to our EDO, Mike King, in achieving this alignment. While many of our leaders are new to their roles, their alignment has produced meaningful results in a relatively short period of time. We still have work to do in sustaining leadership alignment and excellence in our performance, and I will touch on that later.

Third difference—the NRC's interagency coordination is more visible and substantive than before. Greater coordination has given the NRC new perspectives and innovative ideas that enhance how we carry out our safety mission to meet our nation's energy goals. This coordination strengthens our government.

Taken together, these continuities and differences are producing impressive results. Let me show you some of the NRC staff's accomplishments. Since the last RIC, we prepared eighteen EO 14300 draft rulemakings; one is already available for public comment, and several more will be published for comment in the coming weeks. We finalized Part 53—first-of-a-kind risk-informed, technology-inclusive licensing framework, which will also be published very soon. We issued the first commercial advanced reactor construction permit in decades. We approved a restart pathway for a permanently shut down reactor. We renewed thirteen reactor

licenses. We approved innovative technologies. We accelerated fuel cycle licensing. And we launched a fusion regulatory framework. That is what an enabling regulator looks like.

These results are not accidental. They reflect an intentional shift in how we do business. There is not enough time to highlight every accomplishment across every program; know that all parts of the NRC are contributing to the mission. This includes our regional staff and resident inspectors who ensure the safe and secure use of nuclear technologies across the country.

Some of you may have seen the pending changes to our reactor oversight program. The proposed reductions to the inspection program reflect the sustained high levels of safety and security in the operating fleet. They also reflect a strategic rebalancing of agency priorities to support the safe and secure deployment of new reactors and the expansion of existing ones. Our oversight will remain strong. I continue to support our resident and regional inspectors, and risk-informed oversight where it is needed.

We are making major changes across our core business functions—rulemaking, licensing and oversight. This is not incremental change. The new frameworks we are building will set the standards for nuclear safety in America for decades. And what we do here will influence regulatory approaches around the world.

This is the kind of work that defines institutions. Few public servants get the opportunity to redesign an entire regulatory system—and we have that opportunity now. This is a once-in-a-career moment for the entire agency. Our success will enable safe nuclear energy for generations. I am confident we will succeed because of the competence and dedication of the NRC staff.

To meet this moment, I am focusing the agency on three priorities as Chairman.

First priority—core mission delivery with safety, efficiency and speed

Our safety mission is our top priority. Understanding what truly drives safety is something I learned early in my NRC career. Another quick story. During my first few weeks on the job as an NRC resident inspector, a senior inspector took me out on a plant tour. At one point he said something that has stayed with me for my entire career. He said, “We can go out and find violations of NRC requirements. There are some we really care about—and there are others that don’t require a lot of our time.”

That statement taught me two lessons. First, not all regulatory issues are equal. Second, as regulators, we can choose where we spend our time—and where we compel licensees to spend theirs. Those lessons are at the heart of risk-informed regulation. It is about focusing on what truly matters for safety and security.

As we implement the ADVANCE Act and deliver on the EO 14300 rulemakings, we are concentrating on what matters most for safety and security. We will reduce unnecessary conservatism where it does not impact safety. We will eliminate work that does not materially affect mission outcomes. And we will apply risk-informed, performance-based approaches consistently across the entire agency.

Safety and timeliness are not mutually exclusive. We must do both. We will achieve them not by rushing, but by removing the unnecessary things that slow us down and by focusing on what is most important to safety.

Second priority—leadership and operational excellence

Our regulatory performance will not improve on its own. It improves when leadership is aligned and accountable. Direction is clear. Outcomes are defined. Progress is monitored. Teamwork is effective. And results have ownership.

I have directed the EDO to implement a more coherent NRC management model along with complementary leadership behaviors. When leadership is aligned on what excellence looks like, the staff can execute with confidence. When expectations for excellence are clear, performance follows. A disciplined management model is not about adding bureaucracy. It is about removing friction and focusing on excellent outcomes.

Our goal is to engrain the new NRC management model and leadership behaviors in our day-to-day work, so they become enduring elements of how the NRC does business long after all of us in this room are gone.

And third priority—sustainable performance through continuous improvement

Strong organizations do not stand still. They learn. They adjust. They invest in their people. They question themselves.

They ask: Why are we doing this? Why are we doing it this way? What can we learn from our experiences?

Continuous improvement is not criticism of the past. It is essential to fulfilling our mission. It is how we stay relevant. It is a commitment to getting better every day—it is the mindset that today will be better than yesterday and tomorrow will be better than today.

To strengthen our culture of continuous improvement, we will leverage an Institute of Nuclear Power Operations (INPO) document used in the industry to sustain high levels of performance—INPO 19-003. This document emphasizes important values for a culture of continuous improvement. These values will help us sustain excellence and evolve with future changes in our regulatory environment.

Let me close.

This is an exciting time for nuclear safety regulation. The NRC has entered a new era of reform to ensure our regulatory system is credible, predictable and aligned with the nation's energy needs. We are strengthening leadership alignment, sharpening operational discipline and reinforcing a culture of continuous improvement that will outlast any one Chairman or Commission.

This reform succeeds only if safety and security performance remains strong. As an enabling regulator, we are not lowering our expectations for high performance—from ourselves

and from those we regulate. Sustained safety performance across the industry is essential to public trust and to America's nuclear energy future. We are all in this moment together.

Going forward, the American people can expect the following from the NRC: Safety first. Independence always. Discipline, efficiency and timeliness in all we do.

Thank you for your attention. I look forward to your questions.