



UNITED STATES NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

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American Nuclear Society Annual Conference June 1, 2026 Chairman Ho Nieh (remarks as prepared for delivery)

Good morning, everyone. It is an honor to keynote this year's American Nuclear Society Annual Conference. Thank you to ANS President Hashemian, CEO Craig Piercy and General Chair Amy Roma for the invitation. Thank you to the ANS community—for more than seventy years, ANS has advanced nuclear science and technology for the benefit of humanity.

It is an exciting time to be in nuclear! We are at the most consequential moment for American nuclear energy in nearly fifty years. As I look around this room, I see nuclear innovators, industry veterans and new talent—you are the leaders building America's nuclear future. As we celebrate our nation's 250th anniversary, we are laying the groundwork of American nuclear energy for the next 250 years.

This year's theme—Net Out and Power Up—is right on target. Fusion is closing in on net energy gain. Advanced fission technologies are moving toward real commercial deployment.

America urgently needs more energy due to artificial intelligence, data centers and industrial growth. Nuclear is seen as essential to our energy security. This is evident in the actions of President Trump, the bipartisan support of Congress, the substantial capital investment, the growing interest from States and the increasing public support for nuclear power.

The conditions are ideal for America to lead the world again in nuclear energy.

Consider this: in the last 30 years, almost 60 reactors came online in China. In the United States—only three. That is not just a statistic—it is a strategic gap that America must close. Right now, many countries, including our allies, are choosing reactor partners. If America cannot deliver, those countries will buy foreign reactors and accept the geopolitical leverage they carry.

American nuclear energy leadership is not only about our energy security—it is also our national security. Reestablishing U.S. global nuclear energy leadership rests on three pillars.

First pillar, our capability—what we have. This includes innovative technologies, a strong supply chain, a skilled workforce and end-to-end infrastructure across the entire nuclear fuel cycle.

Second pillar, our deployment—what we can deliver. This is through reliable access to capital and disciplined project delivery at scale, on schedule and at lower cost.

Third pillar, our credibility—why we are trusted. This is through strong safety performance across the industry and regulatory decisions that are credible, predictable and timely.

This is not a theoretical construct. Let me share an example of why. The NRC's international team recently met with a country seeking to deploy nuclear. Their minister put it to us plainly—they want a power plant, not a PowerPoint; they will not buy a reactor that has not been licensed and operating in the supplying country.

This is why the NRC matters. America cannot lead if the regulator cannot deliver credible, predictable and timely safety decisions.

Let me be clear: the NRC will not be an impediment to nuclear energy deployment. A new NRC has emerged—one that enables the safe use of nuclear technologies.

In the regulatory context, enabling is aligning our regulations with actual risks, adapting to new technologies and adding flexibility where safety is maintained. Enabling is not a shortcut. It is not a compromise. Enabling is how the NRC fulfills its safety commitment and delivers benefit to America.

And the NRC is delivering results.

Over the past year, we finalized Part 53—a first-of-a-kind risk-informed, technology-inclusive licensing framework—21 months ahead of schedule. We issued a construction permit for a non-light water advanced reactor—9 months ahead of schedule. We approved a first-ever restart pathway for a permanently shut-down reactor. We renewed 18 operating reactor licenses. We issued a license for a TRISO fuel fabrication facility—over 3 months ahead of schedule. We launched a regulatory framework for fusion. And we prepared 21 Executive Order 14300 draft rules.

The slide highlights several other results. This is what a disciplined enabling regulator looks like—and we are just getting started.

This is why I returned to the NRC.

Many of you know I previously served at the agency for over two decades. When I was Director of the NRC's Office of Nuclear Reactor Regulation (NRR), we embraced a vision statement for the NRC's reactor program: "We make SAFE use of nuclear technology POSSIBLE." This statement emphasized the safety and enabling elements of the Atomic Energy Act and served as our sense of purpose.

To be candid, not everyone welcomed that vision. Let me share a story. We had painted this vision statement in huge letters on a wall at NRC headquarters. Soon after, a group of staff came to my office to passionately voice concerns about it. They believed it was too promotional and a retreat from safety. Despite such concerns, we stayed committed to that vision and moved forward against the headwinds of institutional resistance.

As I was leaving the agency, a senior NRC scientist from that group wrote me a letter that I will never forget. He told me he still had some reservations about the words on the wall—but he had

come to believe it was the right direction. And after more than three decades at the NRC, he said he was more energized about our work than ever before.

His message confirmed we were on the right track back then. Now—thanks to the ADVANCE Act—the NRC’s mission includes enabling along with safety. Building on that, President Trump’s Executive Order 14300 is the catalyst for the most comprehensive reform of the NRC in decades.

The NRC is making major changes to how we oversee and license nuclear facilities. We are rebalancing our oversight programs to reflect the strong safety and security performance across the industry. We are developing new licensing frameworks that are predictable, efficient and designed for deployment.

This work is part of a deliberate, coordinated federal government effort. The Department of Energy is investing in and developing the industrial base across the entire nuclear lifecycle. The NRC is providing the new licensing frameworks to make that industrial base possible. Two agencies, each in their own lanes but heading to the same destination—America leading the world again in nuclear energy.

This is the kind of work that defines institutions. Few public servants ever get the opportunity to redesign an entire regulatory system—and we have that opportunity right now.

So, what does the new regulatory system look like?

First and foremost, safety is our top priority—that is our mission and that has not changed. What has changed is how we regulate.

Our regulations are not wine—they do not always get better with age. We are removing unnecessary conservatisms from nearly 70 years ago when we knew far less than what we know today. We are applying risk-informed, performance-based approaches throughout our frameworks to focus on what matters most for safety and to afford maximum flexibility.

For the new reactor community, the name of the game is optionality. Light-water or non-light-water. Large, medium, small or micro. Stationary or transportable. First-of-a-kind, Nth-of-a-kind or only-of-a-kind. Site construction or factory assembly. High, medium or low design maturity. There is a licensing pathway for all of these. New technologies will not be force-fit into licensing frameworks no longer fit for purpose.

Part 53 provides a flexible, risk-informed pathway for all reactor technologies. Part 57 provides a high-volume pathway for microreactors. Parts 50 and 52 are being upgraded to reflect what we have learned over the decades. And we are adding new regulations to coordinate effectively with DOE and the Department of War, and to streamline environmental reviews and contested hearings. This will help us with speed, without compromising safety and rigor.

This major reform is for more than just reactors. It encompasses the entire fuel cycle—beginning to end—as well as other uses of nuclear materials. All to provide flexibility, reduce burden and remove barriers to innovation.

For the operating fleet, we are right sizing the inspection program. The NRC's Reactor Oversight Process (ROP) inspection hours have remained relatively flat for two decades, while industry safety performance steadily improved. More inspection does not equal more safety. In fact, it can be a distraction to safety when resources are spent on matters of very low safety significance. The rebalanced ROP will focus on the most safety-significant activities. Our resident inspectors remain central to strong, risk-informed oversight.

Taken together, these reforms are how America leads the world again in nuclear energy.

Let me close.

The NRC has entered a new era of reform to ensure our safety decisions are credible, predictable and timely.

This reform succeeds only if safety performance remains strong across the industry. Safety, innovation and speed must work together. Successful reform depends on all of us.

We are in a once-in-a-generation moment for American nuclear energy. Our collective actions and decisions now will determine whether America leads or follows in nuclear energy for the rest of the century.

I am honored to serve at the NRC again—and to make sure America leads.

Thank you.