

**THE NEW ATOMIC AGE
ADVANCING AMERICA'S ENERGY FUTURE**

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC GROWTH,
ENERGY POLICY, AND REGULATORY
AFFAIRS

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND
GOVERNMENT REFORM

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THE NEW ATOMIC AGE: ADVANCING AMERICA'S ENERGY FUTURE

TUESDAY, JULY 22, 2025

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC GROWTH, ENERGY POLICY, AND
REGULATORY AFFAIRS

Washington, D.C.

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 1:05 p.m., in room HVC-210, House Visitor Center, Hon. Eric Burlison [Chairman of the Subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Burlison, Palmer, Perry, Frost, and Min.

Mr. BURLISON. This hearing of the Subcommittee on Economic Growth, Energy Policy, and Regulatory Affairs will come to order. Welcome, everyone, to this hearing.

Without objection, the Chair may declare a recess at any time. I recognize myself for an opening statement.

OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN ERIC BURLISON REPRESENTATIVE FROM MISSOURI

Mr. BURLISON. A new age for nuclear power has started, led by President Trump's four recent executive orders on nuclear energy and congressional action to reinvigorate the nuclear industry.

President Trump's orders call for permitting reform and the reduction of overburdensome regulations from the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, which has become a slow-moving bureaucratic mess, constraining and delaying expansion of U.S. nuclear power deployment for decades.

Under President Trump's orders, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) must rule on reactor license applications within 18 months, a dramatic shift from the ambiguous, open-ended timelines of the past.

President Trump's orders also promote expanding domestic mining, enrichment of uranium and other reactor fuels, and nuclear fuel recycling.

These groundbreaking actions will power United States energy independence and provide a secure and reliable U.S. electrical grid, something that we must obtain as the AI revolution places surging demands on our electricity capacity.

At the heart of nuclear power's resurgence are two key innovations: small and micro modular reactors. These new reactors prom-

ise the United States will have a strong answer to future energy demands. They will be more capital effective, more efficient, and more scalable for both on-and off-grid sites here in the United States.

Moreover, they offer enhanced safety features, eliminate the risk of meltdowns, and can use recycled fuel from other reactors.

The Department of Energy predicts that 12 percent of electricity consumption in the United States in the year 2028 will come from data centers, which require constant and consistent electricity. And the Energy Information Agency recently projected that U.S. power consumption will reach all-time highs this year and next, in part due to AI and data center demand.

Nuclear power is the answer to data centers' growing appetite for stable energy.

I recently toured two prototype micro modular reactors being developed here in the United States. I can confidently say the technology is ready.

What is holding nuclear back is the onerous and capital-intensive regulatory permitting burden placed on nuclear energy expansion.

Under the Trump Administration, the Federal government is waking up to the roadblock that nuclear power has faced for decades: the Federal government, not technology, has been in the way.

Congress should and will be watching for the fruits of the Administration's actions and eager to cooperate in achieving this lasting change.

Nuclear power in the age of small modular reactors (SMR)s and Micro Modular Reactors (MMR)s is not just safe—it is essential. It is our best shot at securing clean, reliable American energy independence.

And with that, I yield to Ranking Member Frost for his opening statement.

OPENING STATEMENT OF RANKING MEMBER

MAXWELL FROST, REPRESENTATIVE FROM FLORIDA

Mr. FROST. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

And thank you so much for the witnesses for being here today.

I am glad that we are discussing the potential of nuclear energy. With our climate in crisis, we have to get over our addiction of fossil fuels and diversifying our energy mix is essential for our national security and bringing down the cost of energy for Americans.

I believe nuclear is part of that solution. According to one study, replacing fossil fuels with nuclear power has prevented almost two million deaths worldwide from air pollution as well as 64 gigatons of carbon dioxide emissions.

We are lucky that nuclear power has a strong safety record in the United States. However, though, this does not mean that it is inherently safe. It means that the rules and regulations that prevent a nuclear accident have helped us keep us safe for more than 45 years.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission, or the NRC, is the independent agency responsible for protecting public health and safety by regulating nuclear reactors, and the safety requirements it sets are considered the global gold standard for a reason.

Before the United States became the world leader in nuclear safety regulation, loosely supervised government contractors exposed workers and the public to vast quantities of poorly stored radioactive waste at facilities across the country. Our government failed at protecting our people and exposed many communities to harm.

Take for example, the families who lived and worked around the Hanford Nuclear Production Facility in Washington State.

In the era prior to effective regulation, farm workers like Maria Nicasio and her family would drink from and bathe in river contaminated by waste from the nearby reactors and plutonium processing facilities. They ate crops that were poisoned by these facilities as well.

Maria's mother died of cancer at 60, and tumors developed in both her brother's and her son's heads.

We are living, as one government website explains, Maria's family, quote, "and thousands of other farm workers were likely victims of the effects of radiation from the Hanford Nuclear Facility," end quote.

We are still living with the legacy of government mismanagement and corporate issues as it relates to nuclear. But look also internationally as well. Look at the 2011 Fukushima reactor disaster in Japan. The incident forced more than 150,000 people to evacuate their homes, and the ongoing decontamination efforts are projected to continue for decades.

Actually, in my first term as a new Member of Congress, I had the opportunity to travel to Fukushima and spent the day there with a radiation suit on and a Geiger counter. But I learned about the lessons that Japan has learned from that disaster and how they are forging forward, especially as it relates to SMRs.

I am not here to fear-monger. I am not an anti-nuclear person. But the lessons from history are clear. The nuclear industry must be well-regulated. Only then can nuclear energy play a role in powering our economy, fighting the climate crisis, and reducing deaths from fossil fuel pollution.

Predictably, the Trump Administration is putting these possibilities in jeopardy by crippling the NRC and directing the agency to literally "rubber-stamp,"—"rubber-stamp"—nuclear projects to get them done as soon as possible.

We should be asking whether or not the country or even the nuclear power industry really benefits from a lot of the Administration's wholesale attack on the people and rules that make America's independent, nonpartisan nuclear safety regulators the envy of the world.

The Trump Administration should ask itself whether it wants to be responsible for big disasters that could happen, when we talk about Fukushima or what happened in Hanford, when we can instead expand our nuclear power capacity without exposing Americans to more danger.

Instead of rubber-stamping new reactors, we should be looking at promoting innovative ideas. How can we use modeling and simulation to strengthen the licensing applications and safely streamline the process for proven, standardized technologies?

I hope that today, along with our witnesses, we can shed light on smart next steps that do not involve burning to the ground structures that keep us safe.

Often time, when we talk about streamlining and making things faster, the knee-jerk reaction is, "Well, let us get rid of a lot of the regulations that have kept Americans safe for years and years and years," which can put communities, especially small communities that do not have the resources and the big lawyers to be able to advocate on their own behalf against big nuclear companies, puts them at risk and takes power away from especially small communities across the country.

Instead of that being the knee-jerk reaction, how about looking at how we can streamline our processes?

I would suggest that our next hearing on this topic also include a witness from the Department of Energy's Nuclear Energy Advanced Modeling and Simulation Program and the Oak Ridge National Lab to talk about their work in bringing technology to bear on how to safely accelerate the process of deploying advanced nuclear energy technologies.

Also, maybe no one from the Trump Administration is here to defend its policies because they know that a lot of the things they have done to cripple the NRC are indefensible. And in the words of a former Commissioner Chairman, Trump's actions are, "a guilotine to the Nation's nuclear safety system."

And I think this is really important. It could actually do nuclear a huge disservice in deregulating up the wazoo just to rubber-stamp stuff and move it forward. If something happens, it can put us back decades and decades and decades, especially when we talk about public opinion, which can already be fraught on subjects like this.

I agree, we do need to move faster, but we have to move faster in a very careful way. And so, we should be looking at how we can keep our nuclear project approval process strong, but we also have to put the working people of this country above greed and folks who are threatening to poison our nuclear power industry for decades to come by taking too many steps back.

And so, I hope we can have that holistic view of this issue in this hearing, but also as we move forward.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Mr. BURLISON. Gentleman yields back.

I am pleased to welcome our stellar panel of witnesses who each bring their tremendous experience and expertise to bring valuable conversations here today.

I would first like to welcome Alex Epstein, who is the President and Founder of the Center for Industrial Progress.

Next, we have Joshua Smith, the Energy Policy Lead at the Abundance Institute.

And last, we have Stephen G. Burns, former Chair of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

I want to say thank you for taking time to join us here today. If you could please stand.

Pursuant to Committee rule 9(g), the witnesses will please stand and raise their right hand.

Do you solemnly swear or affirm that the testimony that you are about to give is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

Let the record show that all of the witnesses have answered in the affirmative.

We appreciate you being here today. And just as a reminder, we have read your written statements. You have an opportunity to have 5 minutes. When the light turns yellow, it is time to wrap up. And when it turns red, it is time to close.

And with that, I now recognize Mr. Epstein for his opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF ALEX EPSTEIN, PRESIDENT AND FOUNDER
CENTER FOR INDUSTRIAL PROGRESS**

Mr. EPSTEIN. Thank you.

Whenever we talk about abundant nuclear energy, including SMRs, we need to recognize that the first step is for government to stop doing the immense harm it is actively doing. And this harm is harm that has provably gutted nuclear's potential for decades.

It is important to recognize that in the 70s, clean, safe, nuclear power—and it was very safe, it was the safest form of energy in history even back then—became affordable. And It quickly grew to 20 percent of American electrical power, with the potential to get far more affordable and plentiful. But crushing, irrational regulation, including the way the NRC was set up, made nuclear expensive or impossible to build.

Now, fortunately, Congress has taken some significant steps toward unleashing nuclear with the bipartisan ADVANCE Act. In my testimony today, I want to focus on how the NRC can act quickly on the ADVANCE Act in a way consistent with the recent Presidential executive orders (EO)s. But happy to answer any questions also about what should be in future legislation since I think there is a lot that can be improved on the ADVANCE Act.

But I want to give you my top four recommendations for what the NRC can do within the current law, and all of these will make nuclear abundant without compromising safety.

So, one is the NRC should strip out the many inefficiencies in its licensing process.

Through the ADVANCE Act, Congress has rightly required the NRC's mission to include getting reactors built efficiently in addition to ensuring they are safe. And recently, the NRC has issued guidance to its offices on how to implement the new mission statement.

But this needs to be done very aggressively. So, the NRC should comb through their licensing process, determine what is truly needed to make plants safe, and strip out all the time-consuming portions that do not help with safety, such as months being wasted on mandatory, “uncontested” hearings where no one even objects but you have to—you might delay it by six months.

Within six months of now, if the NRC pursues this, it could publish a step-by-step licensing map showing the legal purpose, decision criteria, maximum review clock, and NRC official responsible for each stage, plus an online dashboard so applicants and investors can see progress in real time.

By the way, the clock is not showing for me, so I do not know if there is any way that can be indicated—oh, it is. Okay. Thank you.

Number two, the NRC should use the general Environmental Impact Statements (EIS)s by default.

So, Congress, through the ADVANCE Act, has rightly directed the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to switch to general environmental impact statements, GEIS's, which is a single environmental review for a standardized reactor design.

And this means it can be used over and over for identical designs, which allows you to—even if the first thing is expensive to build, the next one, the next one, the next one get cheaper and cheaper to build.

So, the current multi-year process of just doing these EIS's over and over and over is one of the main reasons why even the interest from all the delays in a plant can become over 30 percent of the capital cost of a project.

What the NRC can do specifically is promulgate a rulemaking to make GEIS's the default, particularly for standardized SMR design, so we do not have all this duplicative review, and it can start action on this within 90 days.

Number three is the NRC should replace what is called LNT and ALARA with science-based radiation limits.

So, President Trump's recent EO—one of the most important parts of these EOs are rightly instructing the NRC to reevaluate what is called the "Linear No Threshold," or LNT model, that falsely assumes that there is no safe dose of radiation, which is definitely not the case. And it also has some—it is coupled with something called—the current policy is coupled with "As Low As Reasonably Achievable," ALARA, that leads to limitless pseudo-safety restrictions.

So, LNT and ALARA have resulted in a public radiation dose that is 50 times stricter than what science shows is safe. And this just imposes huge unnecessary costs with absolutely no benefit, and it is a big reason why nuclear has become ten times more expensive than it needs to be.

So, the NRC, what it can specifically do is fast-track a National Academies review of LNT low-dose radiation science. And if they do that properly—I think the literature is pretty clear, LNT is bogus—they can have a real science-based threshold that they can set, which will keep nuclear safe but allow it to be a lot more efficient.

Finally, the NRC should open "nuclear innovation zones" on Federal lands.

So, the recent EOs rightly encourage the testing of nuclear reactors on Federal lands, which would allow private developers to quickly iterate designs and run safety tests without waiting years.

What DOE and DOD can do is formally designate nuclear innovation zones on Federal land. And, specifically, the NRC can issue guidance confirming that data collected on these sites will satisfy what is called performance-based safety testing requirements of regulatory code Part 53, and this can just dramatically, dramatically expedite things.

So, would love to go deep on any of these things. But, basically, if the Administration implements these four reforms, we will have just as much or more safety and we will have much more rapid progress in nuclear.

Thank you.

Mr. BURLISON. Thank you.

I now recognize Mr. Smith for his opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF JOSHUA SMITH, ENERGY POLICY LEAD
ABUNDANCE INSTITUTE**

Mr. SMITH. Thank you, Chairman Burlison and Mr. Frost, Members of the Committee.

My name is Josh Smith, and I am the Energy Policy Lead for the Abundance Institute. We are a mission-driven nonprofit dedicated to creating the cultural and policy environment necessary for emerging technologies to thrive and drive widespread human prosperity.

My three core points to you today are, first, energy is fundamental for prosperity; regulatory failures hold back the nuclear industry; and third, that state policymakers are anxious to play a role in America's new atomic age.

First, prosperity is energy intensive.

America's economic growth, technological progress, and improved quality of life all require more energy, not less. A world of energy abundance is a world of opportunity for industry, for families, and for national strength.

Since the first reactors lit up, nuclear power has played a role in this story but has yet to reach its full potential.

Second, regulatory failures hold back the nuclear industry.

Every discussion of nuclear power's future should start from a simple historical fact: for decades, American engineers built nuclear swiftly, cheaply, and safely. Connecticut Yankee, in 1968, was built for about a billion dollars in today's terms and in about five years.

This trio of swift, safe, and cheap was the norm.

Nuclear's struggles today are not inherent to the technology. They are the product of outdated, unfit, and counterproductive regulations.

Major barriers include ALARA and LNT standards, which impose costs above any kind of offsetting safety benefits; inflexible NRC frameworks that prevent innovation; and nuclear's risks being widely misunderstood.

For example, there were no radiation-caused deaths associated with Three Mile Island (TMI)'s release. The Chernobyl disaster is impossible with modern reactor designs. And, measured in deaths per terawatt hours of electricity production, nuclear is about 800 times safer than coal and 100 times safer than gas generation.

Finally, fears about nuclear waste are overblown. A person's lifetime nuclear waste is about the size of a coffee cup or a little bit smaller than this water bottle. All U.S. commercial nuclear waste could fit on a football field less than ten yards deep. And much of that could be recycled for small modular and advanced reactor styles.

Policymakers should also not forget the interconnected nature of electricity policy challenges. Even with ideal NRC reforms, nuclear projects will be bogged down in the same transmission, interconnection, and permitting reform bottlenecks that strangle all U.S. large-scale infrastructure.

For example, it takes on average, ten years to build a transmission line, yet only three of that is actual construction and seven is related paperwork and permitting problems. Interconnection timelines similarly add years of delay.

Consider that Governor Josh Shapiro had to personally intervene and ask the PGM grid operators to expedite the reconnection of the Three Mile Island reactor. There is indisputable merit in this restart, yet only in broken systems does a project require a Governor to personally intervene.

Free entry in the energy system is fundamentally broken. Nuclear entrepreneurs cannot succeed in a system that blocks entry before shovels hit the dirt. Licensing, permitting, and interconnection are all clogged arteries in need of reform alongside nuclear regulations.

The core lesson is that we need to not just improve nuclear regulations but streamline permitting and grid interconnection to enable nuclear power and ensure an affordable and reliable energy supply.

Next, states are ready for a new atomic age. In the past, governors and state lawmakers played gatekeepers, almost universally for ill. For example, Senator Harry Reid's opposition to storing waste at Yucca Mountain set the tone for today's conversations. Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis opposed the start of the Seabrook plant in neighboring New Hampshire and added about three years of delay to the project.

Today, governors and state legislators are leading the opposite charge, pushing to enable nuclear power in their states. Over 250 nuclear-related bills were introduced in state legislatures over the last two years.

States are now collaborating on nuclear development. Leaders in Utah, my home, like Governor Spencer Cox and many members of the Utah Legislature, work every day to attract and promote nuclear development in the state.

Finally, remember that safe, swift, and cheap nuclear is possible with simple regulatory reform. Ushering in the new atomic age requires tackling the misperceptions about nuclear power's risk and fixing its failing nuclear regulatory system.

Returning to a world where nuclear power is swift, safe, and cheap is not just entirely possible, it is a living American memory.

Fixing these problems will lower energy costs for your constituents, promote a reliable electricity grid, and drive continued improvements in human welfare.

Thank you.

Mr. BURLISON. Thank you.

I now recognize Mr. Burns for his opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF STEPHEN G. BURNS (MINORITY WITNESS)
SENIOR VISITING FELLOW, THIRD WAY**

Mr. BURNS. Thank you again.

The nuclear industry, unlike many, was born regulated. From the very beginning, as President Eisenhower's vision of the peaceful atom was realized, a strong regulator was deemed essential to ensuring public health and safety through rigorous licensing and oversight.

In the United States, that role was initially assigned to the Atomic Energy Commission, which under the Atomic Energy Act of 1954, still the premier piece of legislation in this area, established the licensing framework for civilian applications of nuclear energy.

Concern over the combination of both promotional as well as regulatory responsibilities within the Atomic Energy Commission led to the reforms 50 years ago that established the NRC as an independent regulator and assigned promotion and development to what is now the Department of Energy.

The Convention on Nuclear Safety, the international legal instrument that was adopted after the Chernobyl accident and to which the United States is a party, emphasizes the importance of separation of the regulatory and promotional roles.

The push and pull over the efficacy and appropriateness of the licensing process and the effective focus on the safety review has been with us since the dawn of civilian nuclear energy in the 1950s.

There is always room to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of the regulatory process and adapt it to the evolution of nuclear technologies and their implementation, recognizing that past and current commissioners and technical staff have set in motion changes to reduce regulatory burden and speed the development.

Some of these actions have been at the NRC's own initiative. Others have been endorsed and encouraged by the Congress, such as the ADVANCE Act signed into law last year.

The NRC has protected the health and safety of the American public for 50 years without a single civilian reactor radiation-related death. And the lessons of the Three Mile Island accident, as well as other incidents, have been absorbed into the regulatory process to ensure the continued safety of our facilities.

The current Administration established ambitious goals to increase nuclear energy capacity by, I think, some 300 percent by the year 2050. The recent executive orders propose significant changes for regulatory processes, some basically endorsing the ADVANCE Act's provisions.

What it focuses on is a wholesale revision of safety regulations, shortening schedules for new reactor reviews, while at the same time suggesting the downsizing of the NRC. While the orders mention safety, the focus appears to be primarily reducing regulation and accelerating licensing.

One significant nuclear safety event could derail the entire effort, as was seen after the Three Mile Island accident.

The commitment to nuclear safety and adherence to the principles of good regulation have resulted in the United States safely maintaining the largest fleet of nuclear reactors in the world and the safety standards that the international nuclear community strives to meet.

I do have concerns about unintended safety consequences that reduced NRC independence and a schedule-driven regulatory para-

dig threaten to bring. And the loss of public confidence that can befall a safety agency is a risk when expediency is seen to be given priority.

While I support continued focus on increasing NRC efficiency—and we cannot that a number of things the agency has done recently have come under schedule and at reduced schedules within two years or 18 months—great care must be taken in streamlining licensing and the regulatory process to preclude erosion of high levels of nuclear safety.

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

I am concerned that steps to undercut the independence of the NRC and the commitment to ensuring safety could undermine the reputation of the U.S. reactor vendors in the rest of the world.

A design license in the United States now carries a stamp of approval that can facilitate licensing elsewhere, including many countries that are embarking on a new nuclear program.

If it becomes clear that the NRC has been forced to cut corners on safety and operate in a less transparent manner, reactor vendors will be hurt.

The industry is helped by the fact that it has a strong independent regulator behind it.

In sum, the Administration's objectives will fail if it does not encourage a healthy nuclear safety culture with safety as a high priority. This is critical for the operational success and for preserving the United States' world class reputation.

Thank you.

Mr. BURLISON. Thank you, Mr. Burns.

I was finding it ironic, as I was sitting here listening to your testimony, that your name is Mr. Burns.

Mr. BURNS. Yes.

Mr. BURLISON. And I am sure you have heard that joke before.

Mr. BURNS. Yes, I have. In fact, I was in a French airport once, and I realized that they had given me the wrong luggage tag. And I heard the woman at the desk call down to the luggage handler, and he said the name and he said, "Comme Monsieur Burns?" I said, "Yes, yes, like Mr. Burns." He was referring to "The Simpsons."

So, anyway, yes, it has been kind of a joke over the years. Good one.

Mr. BURLISON. Thank you for that.

All right. I now recognize myself for 5 minutes, and I will begin with Mr. Smith.

I was recently told by one company based here in the United States that they will have a fully functioning MMR abroad in the next year.

They specifically stated that they could not accomplish that in the United States, that they would have to go on foreign soil to demonstrate to the American public and the government that their technology is ready.

What is holding back companies like that from doing this in the United States?

Mr. SMITH. Thank you.

Fundamentally, the problem is we have too many barriers between people who want to build and their ability to put shovels in the ground and put up structures.

So, take one example. It is important that we do continued modeling. It is important that we continue doing extensive testing. But we also need to do real-life testing rather than just rely on the data that we currently use.

In particular, one of the exciting recent state-level endeavors is Governor Spencer Cox in Utah signed a memorandum of understanding with Valar Atomics to develop an SMR within Utah by July 4, 2026.

I just got back from the American Legislative Exchange Council meetings with state legislators from across the country. Every single energy conversation was pulled in by some gravitational force to talk about nuclear policy and what they could do.

There is extensive interest and opportunity, but the states need to actually be allowed to lead.

Mr. BURLISON. I am going to jump to one of my questions, then, regarding the states.

How would they be better suited than the Federal government for regulating this?

Mr. SMITH. One of the key differences between the designs of the 60s and 70s and today is they are very, very different. So, there is little need for containment structures in some of these new designs.

And part of the problem with having a lot of expertise at the NRC is simply that, they have a hammer, they see everything as a nail. And so, we have a problem where new companies come in, they do not need a containment chamber or containment facility for their design, and yet the NRC prescriptive regulations say: thou shalt have one.

And so, state-level interests can develop new rules that avoid this kind of old problem. We could do some of this at the Federal level, of course. I think there is room for Congress to get involved and spin off new agencies within the NRC or separately entirely to pursue these new designs.

States have already taken the right kinds of steps. Texas has been developing an Advanced Nuclear Working Group. Utah similarly has an Office of Energy Development official who is purely devoted to nuclear now in addition to extensive legislative efforts within the state congress.

So, very exciting and lots to do.

Mr. BURLISON. Thank you.

Mr. Epstein, what approach should the United States be taking in regards to this? Should we follow the model of the previous Administration where we used taxpayer dollars to subsidize this development or should we let the free market dictate what happens?

Mr. EPSTEIN. Well, definitely free market. But it really hinges on how you are approaching the issue of safety.

And I really want to push against any idea that the NRC has been a success. The NRC has been one of the greatest failures in policy history.

So, we hear things like, "Oh, the NRC was helpful maintaining the nuclear fleet." Well, why are we saying "maintaining"? It is be-

cause they prevented anything from being done. From 1975, when the NRC was founded, until 2023, not one new plant went from conception to completion.

So, if nuclear is the safest form of energy ever, and it was safer than any form of energy before the NRC, and the NRC basically criminalized it, that is a failure. So, we need to recognize the NRC as it exists is a failure.

Now, that does not mean that it necessarily should not exist. I do believe states have a real role. But we need radical, radical reform. So, It needs to be done within the law. It needs to be done at the NRC.

In particular, we need some good commissioners. We do not have enough commissioners right now. But we need commissioners who can radically reform the NRC. And we need innovation at the state level.

Because what we really want is abundant energy. If we just do a bunch of subsidies, then we are just going to have another subsidized energy industry. That is not what we need. We want to unleash an unsubsidized energy industry.

Mr. BURLISON. And what is happening with the manufacturing of these micro nuclear reactors is that they are eventually wanting to get it to scale. That is the only way that you are going to do this that is cost effective. And yet, what I am told is that they have to get these permitted. Each one would have to go through the same process as if you are doing a large-scale nuclear site.

Is that correct, Mr. Smith?

Mr. SMITH. I believe so. And the Idaho National Laboratory in an April 2025 report suggested legislative reforms to enable general licenses. So, after you have your first of a kind, you would be able to apply. And through some notice and regulatory requirements, you would still be able to apply and build your reactor under a general license.

But I believe the INL's advice requires legislative action.

Mr. BURLISON. That would only make sense, right?

All right. I now recognize Ranking Member Frost for his opening statement.

Mr. FROST. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Trump Administration seems on this, like, science-free deregulation spree. I think it is endangering our health and safety.

And, look, as our national policymakers, we have to balance multiple interests, including supporting the innovation and the developers, but also protecting communities and future generations.

Yet, the Administration's approach to policy, to me, seems singularly focused on growing profits of executives versus the other side of things.

And we see what is going on right now at the NRC. Someone from DOGE, with zero nuclear energy background, has ordered the NRC to, quote, "rubber-stamp" applications for new nuclear reactors.

Now, look, I am excited about the potential of advanced nuclear reactors, SMRs, as part of the solution to our dependence on fossil fuels. But when we are dealing with something as complex as nuclear power generation and as volatile as nuclear fission, speed

alone is not the answer, although we want to be able to streamline things, we want to use technology as best we can.

Mr. Burns, the Nuclear Innovation Alliance, which is a nuclear energy industry think tank, wrote, “Undermining NRC’s independence is damaging to both long-term U.S. interests and to the ongoing work that is required to ensure that nuclear power can provide reliable and clean energy to power the American economy.”

Why is the nuclear industry itself concerned with attacks on the independence of the NRC and Trump’s attempts at rapid deregulation?

Mr. BURNS. Well, I think, Congressman, the reason is that not only historically have we had a regulatory system—that is the expectation under U.S. law as well, as I say, the international paradigm, but it provides—it can provide confidence not—I am going beyond just licensing here. I am going to in terms of the operation and accountability of those who operate the facilities.

Now, granted, there are things within the industry itself. The Institute of Nuclear Power Operations that was founded after the Three Mile Island accident, that adds value to that, and there is communication between the NRC and INPO over the respective work.

But, again, there is a need for ensuring public confidence. And the role of having a strong regulator has been important to that commitment and that role.

Mr. FROST. Yes. And this is damaging the reputation of American reactors and has big potentials of slowing down what we want to do.

We heard from Mr. Epstein, one of our witnesses, who I have met with before. Obviously, have big disagreements with him on the existence of a climate crisis, but we are talking about something else.

He mentioned a timeline of 1975 and the 80s when we saw a downturn. Reactors not being built. Many cases, many closed. He blames it all on the NRC.

But something else might have happened around this time period too that might have pushed public sentiment around nuclear to dramatically drop.

Do you know what I am talking about, Mr. Burns?

Mr. BURNS. Well, to begin with, in terms of what the statistical numbers are, that since the Three Mile Island accident something like 51 power reactors came into operation in the United States. Now, granted, since the 1990s, it is three, the two Vogtle units and the Watts Bar Unit 2.

But part of this is what you have is public confidence. You have issues with respect to—and there was some allusion to this in terms of the grid, how the grid is managed, and the economics there. That has been some of it, low natural gas prices; the emergence of solar and wind production.

And post-TMI. And we are seeing that even just today, where you are seeing some of the post-TMI restrictions on new nuclear having been lifted. I think, like, Wyoming is one of the more recent states, and there are some others.

So, that public confidence piece, combined with other things within the industry itself, also contribute in terms of where you did

not have the big renaissance in the early 2000s as was perhaps planned for.

Mr. FROST. Yes. And nuclear energy, by definition—I mean, I think we have to make—it is a dangerous thing. But what makes it safe—and we want to make it safe—is through the policies that we pass, the work that is done, taking something that, by definition, is a dangerous thing and making it safe to use in the United States.

And I think we can look at the fact that the United States—and we can boast that we have not had a single civilian reactor-related death in 50 years of the NRC's existence, and that did not happen by accident.

And, again, I am not here to say that there is nothing we need to do in Congress to help make sure that we streamline, possibly using modeling simulation, different things like that, so we can move in a faster way, because we want to see this done. But this knee-jerk reaction of deregulation, again, many times can cause unintended consequences, of course, if, God forbid, something would happen.

Thank you for the extra time, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Mr. BURLISON. Thank you.

I now recognize the gentleman from Pennsylvania, Mr. Perry, for 5 minutes.

Mr. PERRY. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thanks to the panel for being here.

I have the distinct honor of representing the district that much of lies in the shadow of the towers, the cooling towers of Three Mile Island.

I am also happy to report that it is a vibrant, healthy, and productive community in the shadow of Three Mile Island. And most of the residents are absolutely thrilled that the jobs will be coming back, that the lights will be coming on, and that the power of Three Mile Island will be produced.

And I, for one, hope that they will install a second reactor, one of the ones that we are talking about here today, on that site that is so well-situated for such a facility.

Now, I cannot go on without just noting that my friends on the other side of the aisle seem to be concerned about the profits that are made by power companies that engage in constructing and operating nuclear facilities, while it seems to me, over the course of at least the last ten years, my colleagues on that side of the aisle have promoted and enacted policies that have increased the bills of my constituents, my bosses, that my neighbors, the people I live around, I do not know, maybe tenfold.

It is astounding. They do not seem to care how much citizens pay for electricity and how much renewable—we will be kind, we will call them “renewable” energy operators make on government subsidies and mandates because their products simply cannot compete in the market. They seem to have no problem with that.

I just think it is important that we at least attempt to set the record straight while we are in one of these hearings and have the counter discussion to just assuming that profit is bad, that everybody that runs a nuclear facility is dangerous, careless, and does not care about the citizens that they serve, and only people inter-

ested in renewables are willing to give up all their profits—which they are not—and provide low-cost energy to the masses—which they are not that either. As a matter of fact, it is the highest cost energy, and it is also very much more dangerous than nuclear energy.

But that having been said, because I am going on, Mr. Epstein, the ADVANCE Act required that the NRC now switch to general environmental impact statements.

One of the things that drives what kind of energy is produced is how investments—when individuals, when concerns invest their money in something, they want to know that they are going to get a return on it. And I hope they get a profit too because they are investing in something and putting their money at risk. That is how things work in America.

But putting your money at risk for 15 or 20 years without any surety that there is going to be a positive outcome is a detractor from that investment. And, essentially, the regulations that are in place now are deterrent to the advancement of nuclear energy and general production itself.

So, if you could just briefly explain how not doing the same thing over and over and over again for the same kind of design is going to be helpful to the industry, save the industry money, and in turn save my bosses, citizens of America, my constituents money.

Mr. EPSTEIN. For sure.

So, I think it is really important that you raise the issue of profit because we absolutely want nuclear energy companies to be able to make a profit by competing to provide the lowest cost, most reliable energy, just like we want phone manufacturers to be able to make a profit providing the most cost-effective phones, AI people providing the most cost-effective AI, et cetera.

There are two kinds of problems that arise. One is when you restrict the ability of profit-making entities to compete by not allowing them to do their jobs, which things like having a new environmental impact statement for every nuclear plant, even if it is the exact same thing. That just dramatically increases cost.

The other thing that you raised is when you subsidize inferior forms of energy, that also raises costs. We always pay more total.

But in particular with solar and wind, it is particularly egregious because what it does is it puts more intermittent, unreliable solar and wind on the grid. It does not replace the reliable energy. It adds to the cost of reliable energy. It allows them to win all of the market bids. So, they take the money away from the reliable power plants. The reliable power plants get defunded, cannot make a profit.

This is why we have a shortage of gas turbines, one of the reasons why nuclear is in bad shape.

But we cannot build dispatchable capacity profitably because we have screwed up the markets with subsidies. So, the Big, Beautiful Bill, by far the best thing about it, in my opinion, was dramatic cuts to these grid-destroying, price-increasing solar and wind subsidies.

Mr. PERRY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield.

Mr. BURLISON. Thank you.

I now recognize Mr. Min for 5 minutes.

Mr. MIN. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Appreciate the opportunity to talk about green energy and innovation, and I have long taken an all-of-the-above approach when it comes to meeting our Nation's energy needs.

I would just note in response to the last witness, obviously solar and wind power are intermittent. However, there are these things called batteries. They are getting better, and they make the grid much more reliable.

In fact, I would just note for the record that according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, the levelized cost of energy for advanced nuclear power was estimated to be \$110 per megawatt hour in 2023 and forecasted to remain the same, even with regulatory changes, up to the year 2050.

By comparison, solar is expected to decline from its current cost of \$55 per megawatt hour to \$25 per megawatt hour, and onshore wind expected to decline from \$40 per megawatt hour to \$35 per megawatt hour over this same period.

Now, that being said, I think that there is a place for nuclear energy, and I think that we should be looking for some of the advancements that may happen.

I have a company in my district, Tri Alpha Energy, it is making—it is developing clean fusion technology. They are hopeful that they can get actual working prototypes of real power plants on the grid in the next ten years. And I know we always talk about clean fusion being on the grid in ten years. Technologies like that do really seem to have promise as we think about how to provide an abundance of energy.

But I also want to note that nuclear fission does present challenges. Just south of my district, in San Onofre, we had a nuclear power plant offline for some years. We still have not figured out what to do with the nuclear waste that was created there. It is a ticking time bomb.

Those of us who represent regions nearby are very concerned that at some point this may leak, that there are security issues with this waste.

And, unfortunately, due to gridlock here in Congress, we have not been able to move that into safe storage. So, it is sitting there, just off the beach. We have seen what has happened, for example, in Fukushima, in Chernobyl. We are very concerned about what might happen there.

But, I guess, my first question is to you, Mr. Burns.

We have seen the massive cuts—formalized later, after they were first illegally undertaken by Elon Musk and his DOGE staff and through executive orders—massive cuts to our Federal Government staffing. And so that has, of course, affected the NRC as well. And in May, Donald Trump issued a number of executive orders requiring the NRC to streamline operations and reduce staff.

Mr. Burns, I was wondering if you could talk about how this might threaten the safety and effectiveness of the NRC's regulatory review and permitting process, and how it might affect some of the safety concerns that a number of us have about nuclear fission.

Mr. BURNS. Okay. Thank you for the question.

The interesting thing with respect to the executive order directed to the NRC is that an early draft of it just adopted the Reduction

in Force (RIF) language that I think you are seeing across the government.

The final version indicated while there might be a need for additional staffing within the context of new reactor licensing and regulation—and I think that is something—fortunately, I hope that it is adhered to. Because if you do have—you have had first movers coming in over the last few years with Kairos, X-energy, some others, Abilene Christian, coming in with respect to new designs—but if you have this big wave, you are going to need the staffing to do those reviews, even taking into account efficiencies that might be able to be implemented and approaches that have been taken over a number of years now by the NRC to effectively do the licensing review.

So, I think that is a place—I cannot give you any specific figures—but that is a place where you have to, I think, have an open mind if you are really going to—looking at to get this—get these things through—that you have the staffing. That is a challenge because you have had an aging staff. And so being able to track staff is very important.

Mr. MIN. Well-trained staff may, in fact, increase efficiency.

Mr. Smith, my last question is to you. You support an Abundance agenda, and I think a lot of us, particularly from places like California, agree with that approach.

At the same time, what we have seen from this Administration is efforts to really handicap and eliminate a lot of the support for clean energy adoption. Meanwhile, in countries like China, we are seeing heavy subsidization of clean energy.

Are we brilliant somehow, and China, Germany, all of them are getting it wrong? Or are we doing something here that might hamper clean, cheap energy of the future?

Mr. SMITH. I think the right approach—and thank you for your question—the right approach for environmentalists is to become free marketeers from now on.

For years we have been hearing—and I have been saying and other environmental activists have been saying—that solar and wind storage are all getting cheaper. This is true. And it is time to concentrate on the real barriers, which are about permitting.

If you look at Energy Information Administration (EIA) projections, the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) really failed, even on its own terms, in the sense that it did not spur the growth that green activists wanted. And the problem is because, as Reagan said, government likes to tax it until it stops moving and then subsidize it again.

The real problem is let us get rid of those regulations. The local siting barriers. Reforms to National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to allow infrastructure of all kinds. And those will have extensive benefits for the clean energy goals as well as just simple energy abundance goals.

And you see this in places like Texas that have free markets in energy. The Federal subsidies are distorting, but you still get steel in the ground in places that let people build.

Mr. MIN. I appreciate that. And we just had a NEPA hearing in Natural Resources. I think many of us are concerned, however,

that NEPA—there is one thing to reform. It is another to essentially eliminate it, and I think we are worried about the latter.

I will just close with this statement, that a number of businesses I talk to believe that the Chinese are so heavily subsidizing clean energy, batteries, things in related technologies, that U.S. companies just cannot keep up, and that eliminating the clean energy tax credits has essentially conceded that market for generations.

With that, I yield back.

Mr. BURLISON. Thank you.

I request unanimous consent for an additional 5 minutes of questions evenly distributed between myself and the Ranking Member.

Without objection, so ordered.

Mr. Epstein, recently I toured a company called Radiant, met with the CEO, Doug Bernauer, who is an amazing individual, who was challenged by Elon Musk to help to colonize Mars and came to the conclusion the only way to provide electricity and to get electricity to Mars was through micro nuclear.

I also met Isaiah Taylor with Valar Atomics, which is an amazing, very creative company that is using carbon sequestration in their process to combine it with other, like, with oxygen or hydrogen in order to create jet fuel, which is just mind-blowing, that you get electricity and the byproduct is jet fuel.

With that being said, can you speak to how the regulatory process for these guys who are doing very creative, very innovative stuff might be stifling to that mindset?

Mr. EPSTEIN. Yes. I admire these guys for trying, because it is just—it is so, so difficult to do things, I mean, for all the reasons I mentioned. The licensing process, it could be difficult to test things. The whole Linear No Threshold and ALARA, As Low As Reasonably Achievable.

So, all these dogmas, as I said, can be changed. And it will just radically open the frontier for innovation where companies like these can go very quickly from idea to action. Right now, there is just an enormous gap between idea to action.

One other thing that needs to change, I think, is the cultural discussion of nuclear. We heard from Ranking Member Frost, and I think some others that Three Mile Island was the problem. But as Scott Perry pointed out, Three Mile Island is not fundamentally a problem. The fact that the worst nuclear accident we have had is something that killed nobody, that should be celebrating nuclear.

So, we need to stop demonizing nuclear like “The Simpsons” did. We need to recognize it is fundamentally safe. It is not safe primarily because of regulation. It is safe because the material cannot explode like combustion can.

Mr. BURLISON. Thank you.

One last question, Mr. Smith.

When I speak to them, they refer to the 18-month period. Can you describe the dynamic of getting the permitting process done and why companies that are ready to go today are having to go through an 18-month period?

Mr. SMITH. Which 18-month period?

Mr. BURLISON. For review.

Mr. SMITH. For review.

So, I think there are a lot of opportunities to reduce review times. One example is actually the mandatory hearings that Alex mentioned in his testimony as well. So those kinds of reviews do not involve input from the public, and they already cut times from six months to three months by moving from in-person oral hearings to written testimony and submissions.

There are a lot of opportunities to cut those down and see the kinds of things like Governor Cox wants to see in Utah. If we can build something by July 4, 2026, we can have test reactors that we do not push companies to the Philippines or outside of the United States to test and experiment what used to be and started as an American technology.

Mr. BURLISON. Thank you.

Recognize Ranking Member Frost.

Mr. FROST. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I mean, you know, there are a few things. I mean, one of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle was talking a lot about picking winners and losers with some of the subsidies we saw in the Inflation Reduction Act. And I have never heard him speak about the tons of subsidies that for over a century we have given the fossil fuels as a country.

And I agree with Representative Min as well. I mean, the biggest winner from the big ugly law ripping away a lot of these investments we have made in American companies as it relates to clean energy is China when we talk about that entire market.

The other thing too that I think is really important to keep in mind is we are not—I mean, I heard this from one of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle too—you are not—we are not here trying to demonize nuclear, nuclear companies. None of us are here saying that nuclear companies want to hurt anyone or anything like that.

But there is a balance here between the safety of our people and also moving quickly on this that it is our job to recognize and keep in mind. And it just—it worries me when we have people saying, well, it is 100 percent, there is nothing wrong with this and that, kind of like what we just heard from Mr. Epstein, that creates this environment where we are more open to big issues which, again, can set us back decades as it relates to nuclear.

But, Mr. Burns, when we heard Mr. Epstein say that nuclear cannot explode like combustion can, you made a face. I just wonder if you have a response to that. And just generally curious, when it comes to human health and safety, why are the careful, comprehensive regulations and inspections still necessary?

Mr. BURNS. I think my reaction is that I acknowledge Three Mile Island, because of design and other facilities, we did not lose the containment. There was some concern over it at the time in terms of some of the assessment.

But what we did, I think what we learned from Three Mile Island, it is not so much whether someone had died or not but how do we think about preventing that in the future. We do not want to go down that path.

And, yes, for example, I agree with Chernobyl—a reactor design that would never have been licensed in the United States. But

again, it is about learning and a learning culture in terms of what does that—what is the significance of that.

There was, for example, no emergency preparedness programs prior to the Three Mile Island accident. That has gone—went into effect.

Other ways of in terms of operator—particularly operator competence and things like that came into being.

And so, those are the things you learn. And you learn them not just from the big accidents but other things that have happened over the years. We learned in terms of looking at security measures after the 9/11 attacks, which actually had a benefit in terms of what we saw as we evaluated the Fukushima Daiichi accident and things like that

So, it is this, if you want to call it a learning culture, but partly is assessing where you have been and what that may mean. And, yes, it also includes saying: where am I misfocusing, or where do I need to improve my focus?

If I could, in response to that question with respect to the mandatory hearing, I and a number of former commissioners have joined, we have sent a letter in supporting basically the elimination of the mandatory hearing.

But what I want to emphasize is that is not NRC's fault. That mandatory hearing has been on the books in the Atomic Energy Act since the late 1950s. And part of that was due to a lack of transparency by the Atomic Energy Commission—thank you, Mr. Strauss—in terms of not providing the Congress or the general public information about the licensing of what was then the Fermi 1 reactor.

Anyway, I support the elimination of the mandatory hearings.

Mr. FROST. Yes, something to explore a lot further in a bipartisan way.

I yield back.

Mr. BURLISON. Maybe we can cosponsor something together.

In closing, I want to say thank you to our panelists for your testimony here today.

And I would like to yield to Ranking Member Frost for his closing remarks.

Mr. FROST. Thank you so much.

Well, I appreciate our witnesses for being here as we talk about an extremely important topic.

Again, I think it is important for people to recognize we are not against innovation as it relates to nuclear, at least the members on this panel, but we want to make sure that safe nuclear energy is part of the solution on ending our dependency on fossil fuels.

But this end-all-be-all effort that we are seeing from many actors to completely deregulate to move that forward is just not something that I think is good for the industry long term, and not good, more importantly, for our people and our communities and the country.

Weakening the NRC's reputation and functionality is bad for the industry, it is bad for the population at large. And I very much disagree with some of the actions we have seen from the Administration on attacking the independence of the NRC. I think it is very important.

The cost in property, cleanup, and lives when disasters do happen have always been extreme. Let us avoid all this, work together, figure out ways that, yes, we can streamline, yes, ways we can use technology in a safe way, but not give up a lot of the safety standards that have made us the envy of the world in terms of our licensing and how safe our reactors are.

Thank you. I yield back.

Mr. BURLISON. Thank you.

I now recognize myself for a closing statement.

I want to say thank you, Mr. Epstein, Mr. Smith, Mr. Burns, again, for sharing your time with us today, your insights, and your valuable testimony.

Today's hearing has made one thing abundantly clear, and that is that advanced nuclear technologies hold tremendous promise for the future of clean, reliable, and secure energy in the United States.

Small modular reactors and micro modular reactors offer scalable, resilient power generation with zero carbon emissions. Their modular design reduces construction timelines, enhances safety, and opens the door to greater deployment of nuclear power in remote and underserved areas—even maybe Mars.

Whether it is to power the industrial base, a rural community, or a critical military installation, the possibilities of application for these new technologies are almost endless. But as we heard today, the greatest obstacle to deployment is not science or engineering. It is government.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission must evolve. The NRC's current licensing framework was built for the traditional gigawatt-scale reactors, not for micro or small nuclear.

If we want to maintain global leadership in nuclear technology, Congress should take back and should back the Trump Administration's demand for a more agile, risk-informed, and performance-based regulatory approach.

Advanced reactors are not a science experiment. They are a competitive advantage for the United States. But unless we act with urgency, unless we align our regulatory institutions with the pace of innovation, then we risk ceding that advantage to someone else.

This Subcommittee will continue its oversight of these issues to help assure that that does not happen.

And with that, without objection, all Members will have five legislative days within which to submit materials and to submit additional written questions for the witnesses, which will be forwarded to the witnesses for their response.

If there is no further business, without objection, the Subcommittee will stand adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 2:05 p.m., the Subcommittee was adjourned.]