

Opening Statement of the Honorable Fred Upton
Subcommittee on Energy and Power
Hearing on “H.R. 4979, the Advanced Nuclear Technology Development Act of 2016 and
H.R.____, the Nuclear Utilization of Keynote Energy Policies Act”
April 29, 2016

(As Prepared for Delivery)

With two nuclear power plants just miles from my home in Southwest Michigan, I know firsthand the importance of safe, clean nuclear energy to the nation’s energy portfolio, as well as the economic benefits nuclear brings to local communities. Nearly thirty percent of Michigan’s electricity is generated by nuclear power and the industry supports more than 2,900 highly skilled employees in the state. Because of the large role nuclear energy plays in Michigan and across the country, it’s imperative that folks have confidence in the Nuclear Regulatory Commission’s mission to protect public health and safety. This mission can, and should, be achieved while also providing regulatory certainty for NRC licensees and stakeholders. And the simple fact is we can’t have nuclear power without the NRC.

As a fee-based organization, Michigan ratepayers fund the NRC through utilities in annual fee assessments. This structure requires continued Congressional oversight to assure the NRC diligently manages its operations and continually strives to become more efficient. The proposed legislation for review this morning seeks to do just that.

Over half of today’s nuclear power plants commenced operation over thirty years ago and many are likely to enter the decommissioning process in the next decade. The age of the existing fleet should encourage policymakers to look to the next generation of nuclear energy technologies. The NRC’s existing regulatory structure was designed to license and oversee light water reactor technology that was developed as a result of a policy choice due to our nuclear navy. Today, innovative engineers are developing promising new nuclear technologies that could bring significant design improvements to take us beyond the current fleet of nuclear power plants.

In order to achieve this goal, private stakeholders must understand the criteria by which the NRC will accept non-light water reactor designs. It is also important for the NRC be prepared to receive and review these designs in a timely manner. Congressman Latta’s bill, the Advanced Nuclear Technology Development Act, will direct NRC to fulfill those obligations. I thank him for his forward thinking on this issue.

Representative Kinzinger’s discussion draft highlights the importance of NRC licensees to maintain confidence that licensing and other regulatory activities are resolved in a timely, efficient, and safe manner. The proposed legislation would maintain the existing “gold standard” of safety regulation by the NRC, while implementing some commonsense policies and process changes. I recognize that there may be differing viewpoints in how to achieve this high standard and I hope today’s hearing is a constructive step in facilitating those discussions. I look forward to exploring these issues in greater detail as we have an eye toward our nuclear future.

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