

Opening Statement of the Honorable Ed Whitfield
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)

Nuclear energy is an integral part of an “all of the above” energy policy. The current fleet of 100 operating nuclear power plants safely and reliably generates about 20 percent of our nation’s electricity. However, many of these power plants are approaching the end of their current license and unnecessary regulatory costs are adding to challenging economic conditions. This outlook provides a timely opportunity to examine proposals to improve the regulatory framework for nuclear power plants and options to develop a regulatory framework for advanced nuclear technologies.

I have raised concerns in previous oversight hearings about the Nuclear Regulatory Commission’s (NRC) discipline in its regulatory activities and responsiveness to NRC licensees. It is Congress’ responsibility to consider how these activities can be improved while assuring adequate protection of public health and safety. I am confident we can identify efficiencies to assure NRC adheres to their Principles of Good Regulation, while fulfilling their critical mission.

New nuclear technologies hold great promise to operate in a cost competitive environment, with even greater safety margins than existing reactors while generating less waste and reducing proliferation concerns. However, regulatory uncertainty is repeatedly cited as a top barrier to developing these technologies. The Department of Energy, which supports nuclear research and development activities, should collaborate where applicable, with the NRC to address this uncertainty.

Today we will hear from stakeholders about how to more effectively manage the regulatory process, including options to increase the efficiency and certainty of the NRC’s existing licensing process. Representative Kinzinger’s discussion draft highlights that cumbersome red tape in our regulatory process forces ratepayers to pay more for safe, clean nuclear power.

I appreciate Congressman Latta’s leadership to address regulatory barriers hindering the development of advanced nuclear technologies. His legislation, the Advanced Nuclear Technology Development Act, will assure that DOE’s technical expertise, research, and facilities are utilized when appropriate to assist the NRC. This legislation also requires the NRC to draft the regulatory roadmap for the scores of companies who need a regulatory framework for 21st century nuclear technologies.

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