

Chairman John Shimkus' Opening Statement  
Joint Hearing - Subcommittee on the Environment &  
Subcommittee on Energy  
"Fiscal Year 2019 Nuclear Regulatory Commission Budget"  
10:15 a.m., March 20, 2018

(As prepared for delivery)

Welcome to our hearing this morning as we will examine the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's Fiscal Year 2019 budget proposal. The NRC's essential role in licensing and regulating nuclear facilities is of great importance to my Illinois constituents.

Illinois produces the largest share of nuclear-generated electricity in the country. Throughout the state, the commercial nuclear energy industry supports thousands of high-paying jobs, funds local school districts, and provides reliable, clean, baseload electricity around the clock. In fact, a little over 75 years ago, Illinois was the site, at a lab under the University of Chicago's football field, where physicists and engineers first generated a self-sustaining nuclear chain reaction. We are proud to be the birthplace of nuclear technology.

While I do not have any commercial nuclear power plants in my Southern Illinois district, I do represent the nation's only uranium conversion facility located in Metropolis, Illinois. In October, the plant's owner announced it was suspending operations at the site due to market conditions for uranium. We have a glut of uranium on the market, and lingering low demand, in part due to the suspension of the Japanese fleet of nuclear power plants in the wake of the Fukushima earthquake seven years ago.

While there may not be an immediate fix to the uranium market, the most important policy to help my constituents return to work is a strong positive outlook for our nation's domestic nuclear industry. To maintain a robust nuclear industry, Congress must consider the many different opportunities to provide a pathway to keep existing plants operational, while establishing the foundation for new nuclear energy deployment in the next decade.

While mining, converting, enriching and manufacturing nuclear fuel is a necessity to support the front end of the fuel cycle, we are long past due to manage the back end of the fuel cycle. As we do this, we have to recognize that uncertainty about our used fuel commitments will continue to be a political albatross around nuclear

energy development until the Department of Energy starts sending clear signals and reconstitutes its nuclear waste management organization.

I very much appreciate that last year the Commission, for the first time since 2010, requested funding to resume its review of the pending Yucca Mountain license application, as required by law. While it is still incumbent on Congress to provide the funding, it is refreshing to see an Administration that is committed to following the law.

As I have noted on many occasions, the NRC's independent review of the license will answer the safety and environmental impact questions the State of Nevada has raised. To gain the public's confidence in nuclear energy, we *must* have a functioning nuclear waste management program.

The Commission's strong legacy of effective and efficient regulation is another key component of public confidence. However, the many pressures on the nuclear industry provide an opportunity for the NRC to reassess its regulatory process and flexibility. The Commission's FY 2019 budget sets the parameters for how the organization will steward its resources in a changing environment.

Last month, we heard a clear message of urgency. As your former colleague, Bill Ostendorff, succinctly pointed out, our civilian nuclear energy industry infrastructure is the underpinning of our strategic nuclear defense capabilities. In turn, an agile regulatory regime that oversees the breadth of the nuclear supply capacity supports our national interests. Mr. Ostendorff's testimony highlighted the critical need to advance a suite of nuclear policies to define our nuclear future and establish a durable program to sustain the industry for the next generation of nuclear leaders.

This morning we will seek some of those answers and I look forward to working with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to address this critical issue.