

**Republican Leader Cathy McMorris Rodgers**  
**“Keeping Us Safe and Secure:**  
**Oversight of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission”**

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*As prepared for delivery*

From clean, reliable power generation to industrial uses to medical diagnostics and treatment, nuclear technologies are helping America win the future.

These benefits extend world-wide, thanks to long established American leadership. Sixty-seven years ago, Congress enacted the essential policies that continue to guide safe nuclear development for here at home and that we export abroad.

The Atomic Energy Act sought to encourage the widespread use of atomic energy for peaceful purposes, consistent with ensuring our common defense and public health and safety. With that policy, we led the world for several decades in development of civilian nuclear technologies. It also set the standard for safety and security that continues to this day.

The world we are confronting today, however, presents new challenges to our technological leadership. For nuclear power generation there are international challenges; notably from China and other nation-states that are working to dominate emerging nuclear markets.

There are domestic economic challenges. Certain federal and state policies undermine the economic vitality of nuclear reactors in some regions—even if they are necessary to provide reliable, clean, zero-emission power.

This in turn threatens long-term American nuclear competitiveness and strategic interests. It risks loss of our nuclear industrial base, future innovation, and workers with operational know-how, not to mention harmful consequences in communities when nuclear plants shut down.

To be sure, these energy policy issues hover outside the purview of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's mission as an independent safety regulator. In keeping with Atomic Energy Act goals, the agency should operate in ways that do not add to the challenges.

As NRC Chairman Chris Hanson himself noted in a March speech: "The NRC must do its best not to be an impediment to innovation and deployment." I agree with that. A key question for this hearing concerns how this agency plans to unleash innovation going forward.

Will it update its regulations to account for the best available data and operational experience? Will it establish predictable, clear regulations appropriate to the risks of the technologies it licenses?

To address future climate risks, to strengthen our global competitiveness and security, beat China, and win the future of nuclear, there is urgent need to deploy innovative new technologies.

There is a lot to be excited about. The Pacific Northwest alone hosts a number of advanced nuclear companies working towards demonstrating and licensing. NRC actions in the next few years will be critical for these companies.

Oregon-based NuScale Power's small modular reactor has just reached the last step to finalize NRC's design certification.

TerraPower's Natrium and X-Energy's XE-100 both are collaborating with Energy Northwest to develop projects for demonstration.

The safety attributes of these small modular technologies promise a range of new deployment opportunities. X-Energy also is seeking to certify advanced TRISO [TRY-so] fuels, which promise additional safety benefits.

To fully capture these economic, innovation, and climate benefits, the NRC must be prepared to review, license, and regulate these technologies in a timely and efficient manner. Fortunately, the NRC has been working towards this goal. And it possesses a wealth of information for smart regulations that meet the safety mission appropriately.

Former Commissioner Annie Caputo noted recently that the nuclear industry has more than 4,500 combined years of operational experience with generating nuclear power. Because of the lessons of this experience, the U.S nuclear fleet is operating at the highest levels of performance and safety in its history.

In 2019 and 2020 the industry produced record levels of power, with fewer operating plants. Performance like this is achieved through safe operations. And this experience should continue to inform NRC as it seeks to improve how it performs its mission. I look forward to discussing that today.

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