

Committee on Energy and Commerce

**Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of**

Subcommittee on Environment and Climate Change Chairman Paul D. Tonko

Hearing on “Keeping Us Safe and Secure: Oversight of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission”

July 14, 2021

Thank you, Chairman Rush for leading today’s hearing.

And welcome to Chairman Hanson and Commissioner Wright, and a special welcome back to Commissioner Baran.

We always appreciate you taking time from your important work to update the Committee on the NRC’s budget request and issues before the Commission.

I’ll start by echoing Chairman Rush’s comments about the importance of nuclear power, which accounts for half of our carbon-free electricity.

Nuclear is an important, clean part of our energy mix.

But we know many facilities face economic challenges, several have closed prematurely in recent years, and several more are planned to close in the 2020s.

We also know the reality that some portion of these plants’ power will not be replaced with carbon-free electricity.

And even if it were to be, new clean megawatt-hours brought online will backfill those lost clean electrons rather than increasing our overall supply of zero-emissions resources.

So, for the sake of our urgent climate needs, it is critical that existing reactors continue to operate through the end of their licenses.

I support several potential federal policies that would enable that to happen by recognizing the positive environmental attributes of nuclear energy.

I also think the federal government can help realize new potential revenue streams for these facilities, such as the production of clean hydrogen, through proper incentives, such as demonstration projects and loan guarantees.

But of course, first and foremost, these reactors must continue to operate safely.

In May, I was able to visit the Beaver Valley Power Station in Pennsylvania. I met with the facility’s management, security officials, and IBEW workforce.

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I was also fortunate enough to be able to spend time with the site's two NRC resident inspectors.

It was clear that the NRC staff are dedicated public servants that care about safety not only because they are consummate professionals, but because they and their families live in the communities that these facilities operate.

I have the utmost respect for the work of the NRC staff, and I want to ensure the Commission has the resources necessary to keep these on-site inspectors in place.

Over the past 16 months, we have learned a lot about the nature of work and how much can be done remotely, including even Congressional business.

But safety and security inspections at nuclear facilities cannot be conducted over Zooms.

So, I hope NRC inspectors are able to get back to work safely, and the Commission does not pursue actions that would reduce inspections or seek to substitute remote monitoring for in-person inspections and security tests.

And while safe operations are the top priority, I know Members are interested in hearing about other proceedings before the Commission, including for advanced reactors, environmental justice, and decommissioning.

We also know the Commission, along with DOE and Congress, has a role to play in addressing our nation's waste challenges.

A long-term solution for existing spent fuel— not to mention potential waste from new advanced reactors— will certainly be critical to the long-term viability of nuclear power in this country.

I want to thank the Commissioners again for joining us today.

I look forward to hearing your testimony about issues before the Commission, and I hope that we can work together to ensure safe and secure nuclear energy continues to play a role in our nation's efforts to reduce air pollution and achieve science-based climate targets.

Thank you, Chairman Rush. I yield back.