Committee on Energy and Commerce

Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Subcommittee on Energy, Climate, and Grid Security
Ranking Member Diana DeGette

Hearing on "American Nuclear Energy Expansion: Powering a Clean and Secure Future"

April 18, 2023

Thank you, Chairman Duncan.

As we look to transition our nation to zero-carbon emitting forms of energy to stave off the worst effects of the climate crisis, it's important to understand the role that nuclear energy can play in that fight.

Nuclear energy is responsible for generating nearly 20% of all of our nation's electricity.

And it's now responsible for almost half of all the carbon-free electricity that we create here in the United States.

We know that to combat the climate crisis, we must reduce our emissions. And the only way to do that is to reduce our reliance on fossil fuels while electrifying every aspect of our lives.

If done with rigorous, science-based regulations, nuclear energy can help us manage that load.

It has the ability to help us move toward a zero-carbon energy future, without sacrificing Americans' access to the electricity they need.
Because, here's the thing, if we are going to reach our climate goals, we are going to need a diverse mix of energy sources, and nuclear can be one of those sources. However, that is not to say that nuclear energy is the single, perfect solution to our country's energy needs. In fact if nuclear energy is to play a role in our energy transition, we must address two things.

First, the United States must develop a comprehensive, science-based strategy to dispose of spent fuel.A strategy that does not cause harm to public health and our environment.
If we don't have a long-term permanent solution for disposing of nuclear waste, then we will struggle to be able to use this source of carbon free electricity.

We must also figure out how to handle the aging of our nuclear plants. Since I've been in Congress, we've had one new nuclear power plant come online. And during that same time, we have shut down and decommissioned many reactors across the country. Because of advancements

in technology that have been made over the years, the U.S. nuclear industry has been able to maintain its non-carbon emitting electricity generation capacity for more than three decades now. But, with several more nuclear plants scheduled to close in the coming years and as the impacts of the climate crisis become more apparent, we have to find ways to avoid any reductions in the non-carbon emitting portfolio of our energy sector.

The chairman and I sent a series of letters yesterday to key stakeholders in the nuclear industry asking for their input and recommendations on how we can improve the licensing process without sacrificing the health and safety of our constituents.
As we continue to invest in and expand our use of nuclear energy in this country, it must be done in a way that continues to protect the health and safety of the American people.
In no way will we allow people's health and safety to be put at risk.

We need rigorous, science-based regulations and strict oversight. And I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today about potential improvements to the application and licensing processes. I also believe, however, that it's important that we hear from the body overseeing this work, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

And I would ask, Mr. Chairman, that as a follow-up to this hearing, we hold another hearing with commissioners from the NRC to discuss – from their point of view – where we can make improvements without sacrificing public health and safety.

And with that, I yield back.