Chair Jeff Duncan
Energy Subcommittee Hearing: "American Nuclear Energy Expansion: Powering a Clean and Secure Future"
April 18, 2023

As prepared for delivery

Thank you all for being here today.

I called this hearing to set the table for what I hope will be bi-partisan, durable policymaking this Congress to expand American nuclear energy—and its many benefits for the nation.

I think we're off to a good start: Just last week, Chair Rodgers, Ranking Member Pallone, Subcommittee Ranking Member DeGette and I wrote a number of key nuclear associations and stakeholders to assist our efforts.

We asked for comments and recommendations for what may be needed to update nuclear licensing and regulatory activities to provide for a robust and growing industry.

The stakeholder information we seek will inform our work to deploy more nuclear energy.

Just yesterday, several of my colleagues on this Committee and I returned from a trip to Europe. We met with several groups excited about the promise of deploying more nuclear, especially advanced reactors like SMRs.

While many European countries are expanding nuclear power, Germany is actively shutting it down. Just this past weekend, they shutdown their three remaining nuclear plants. We cannot let this be the reality in the US. Nuclear energy must be part of our energy matrix.

To expand the industry, it is vital we encourage regulatory certainty and make sure our reactor licensing processes enable the safe and broad deployment of nuclear technologies. This is especially important for advanced reactor technologies.

The Department of Energy and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission play important roles to advance a new era of nuclear innovation.

DOE and its national labs provide critical support to developing, demonstrating, and promoting advanced nuclear. The NRC, of course is important for assuring the public of adequate protection of health and safety of nuclear operations.

I am from South Carolina—my state is a leader in Nuclear Energy. Nuclear power is responsible for nearly 54 percent of our State's total electricity and over 90 percent of our carbon-free electricity. We are also home to the Savannah River Site (SRS), a DOE nuclear security enterprise site, which supports our nation's nuclear weapons and environmental management missions.

South Carolina also witnessed the failure of V.C. Summer. This project has created perceived risks of uncontrolled cost overrun and project abandonment which has limited commitment to new reactor development in this country.

We can't let this concern inhibit nuclear deployment.

Nuclear energy is by far our nation's leading source of carbon-free electricity. It is also among the most reliable sources of power, with a capacity factor surpassing 90 percent—more than any other generating source.

Being a leader in nuclear technology provides the United States significant geopolitical leverage. A robust nuclear energy export market gives America credibility to set global nuclear norms, the guidelines that ensure safe nuclear energy generation and exports.

Despite this, growth in the US nuclear industry has stagnated over the past decade.

China and Russia are seizing this opportunity and doubling down on their nuclear investments.

We cannot cede our global leadership to our adversaries. We must prioritize modernizing our regulatory structure in the United States and do what is needed to encourage growth throughout the industry.

We also must look at what is standing in the way of demonstrating and deploying advanced reactors.

Our engineers are developing a new reactor designs that promise less expensive, more efficient, widely deployable, and "walkway safe".

We must modernize our licensing structure and establish an advanced fuel supply to bring these technologies online.

The U.S. nuclear fleet is operating at the highest levels of performance and safety in its history. If you visit a nuclear plant, you will see the commitment to safety in their procedures.

Let's talk about that experience today and how it should inform our policies.

Our witnesses today provide testimony from different perches in the stakeholder community—from a leading DOE National Laboratory to utilities and industry to policy think tanks. They can help guide us through some of the promises and challenges to expanding nuclear energy here in the United States.

Thank you all very much for being here, I am looking forward to hearing your perspective on ways we can advance Nuclear Energy in the United States.

I now recognize Ranking Member DeGette for five minutes.