

Chair Jeff Duncan
June 14, 2023
Subcommittee on Energy, Climate, and Grid Security
**“Oversight of NRC: Ensuring Efficient and Predictable Nuclear
Safety Regulation for a Prosperous America”**
As prepared for delivery

Let me thank everyone for being here today and welcome all five NRC commissioners.

It has been over two years since we heard directly from the Commission, and about nine years since we had a full panel of five commissioners before the Committee.

This is an exciting time in nuclear energy. And it is an important time to make sure our laws and policies are up to date and will enable the full promise of nuclear energy.

Today we will hear from you, the commissioners, who set the policies for NRC, to discuss and understand how you are preparing the NRC for the future, what is working, what is not working, what needs to be done.

We have a bipartisan goal on this committee of advancing durable nuclear policy that will expand nuclear energy and its many benefits for the nation.

Part of this work involves examining NRC to ensure its licensing, its regulation and oversight of safety and security is predictable, efficient, risk-informed, performance based, and protective of health and safety.

A well-functioning NRC that meets these goals, helps achieve the broader policy goal established by Congress, which is to enable the expansion of nuclear that will be key to a more prosperous America.

In April, Chair Rodgers, Ranking Member Pallone, Subcommittee Ranking Member DeGette, and I wrote a number of stakeholders for recommendations that may be needed to improve NRC and federal nuclear policies generally.

As we work on this legislation, your testimony today should help our efforts.

We can all agree here on the numerous benefits of maintaining a robust U.S. nuclear industry. The current nuclear fleet consists of 94 reactors, with Vogtle Unit 3 coming online just last month. This was the first nuclear unit built in the United States in more than three decades.

This fact is reflective of the fact our current licensing structure is not set up to encourage large-scale growth or investment of large-scale nuclear projects. (*V.C Summer—SC*)

Nuclear energy accounts for nearly 20 percent of our nation's total electricity and more than half of the country's carbon-free electricity. In my home state of South Carolina, nuclear power generates over 90 percent of our carbon free electricity and over half of our total electricity.

The benefits of nuclear energy range from grid reliability, emission reduction, and national security. New and advance reactor technology provides exciting promise for the future of the industry.

In order to achieve this promise, the NRC must be ready. Its work to license nuclear technologies and assure adequate safety of the industry is central to nuclear expansion.

The NRC has been talking about preparing for the future for a long time. More than five years ago, the NRC's then Executive Director of Operations initiated [a transformation effort](#). Building on other recent reforms, that effort led to continued work on transformation—all to meet the needs of existing and future fleets.

Shortly after that, at the end of 2018, Congress passed the Nuclear Energy Innovation and Modernization Act, or NEIMA, which pressed NRC to develop a new regulatory framework to license advanced reactors.

I'm hopeful we'll get a sense today how agency and Congressional efforts have been working. From what we learned in our April hearing with industry experts, it may not be going so well.

The NRC has been slow to update its environmental reviews and site and construction permits. It has sent uncertain signals about the policy direction of the Commission—leading to uncertainty.

And its implementation of a new regulatory framework for advanced reactors has to date been a profound disappointment.

I'm hopeful we can hear some positive news today. Chair Hanson and the other Commissioners speak positively about preparing the NRC for the future.

But I'd like to start seeing some concrete evidence that progress is being made.

Modernizing the agency does not mean moving away from its principles of safety, it means ensuring regulations are updated to reflect the advances and capabilities of the nuclear industry today.

The United States has the technological and engineering talent and capabilities to be the global leader in nuclear. We need a regulator that reflects this to propel us into the nuclear future.

I now recognize Ranking Member DeGette for five minutes.