

**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: Updating Policies for Efficient,  
Predictable Licensing and Deployment”***

**July 18, 2023**

Thank you, Chairman Duncan, for holding this hearing. I think this is an important conversation and opportunity for us to learn and find ways to support a nuclear industry that emphasizes public health and safety. As I have said in previous hearings on nuclear energy, nuclear energy has the potential to meaningfully drive down our emissions as we transition to zero-carbon energy.

We all know these statistics, but they’re worth repeating, currently, nuclear energy makes up nearly 20% of the electricity we generate in the United States, and nearly half of the carbon free electricity that we generate.

So, as we continue to move toward a clean energy transition, nuclear energy could supply a significant portion of the carbon-free base-load power we need in the future. Now, I say could for a very important reason. We can only invest deeply in the nuclear industry if we continue to prioritize public health and safety before anything else. So, to that end, I would like to thank the Chairman for including my NRC workforce bill in this hearing, along with Rep. Levin’s bill.

As the lead safety regulator of nuclear energy and nuclear materials, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission has an incredibly important role in this prioritization. It is critical that the NRC has the staff, tools, and resources it needs to operate at the highest level possible – the staff component especially. Back in May, when we held our NRC oversight hearing, Chairman Hanson stated in his testimony that, to achieve its goals, the NRC must maintain a highly qualified workforce. But currently, one-third of the NRC’s staff is eligible for retirement. This expected attrition, in addition to the anticipated increase in reactor applications creates a challenge for the NRC as it completes its work, and it is why I introduced the Strengthening the NRC Workforce Act of 2023.

My bill is simple. It would give the Chairman of the NRC direct hire authority during candidate shortages or when there is a critical hiring need for certain positions. This authority is similar to the direct hire authority that Congress gave to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission in the Energy Act of 2020. Additionally, it would allow the NRC to increase its existing employee’s compensation, helping the NRC retain staff.

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As the lead nuclear safety regulator, it is important that the NRC has the full workforce it needs to complete its work. I was also pleased to see Rep. Levin's NRC Office of Public Engagement and Participation Act of 2023, which would establish the Office of Public Engagement and Participation at the NRC. One of the most important parts of any major energy project is community input. We cannot act like public participation is inconsequential. In fact, we know that a lack of public participation is what slows projects down. Whereas, early, meaningful public engagement allows developers to avoid issues and make the changes necessary to avoid unnecessary slowdowns.

Additionally, as we are all aware, nuclear energy is an incredibly complicated and sometimes contentious topic, and the Office established by Rep. Levin's bill would give communities the support that they need to fully understand the impact of a project on their community. We cannot sacrifice public health and safety, and we cannot ignore the voices of those most directly impacted by energy development, and I believe these two bills help address both of those issues.

Now, there are some bills we are considering that concern me. Some of these bills would cut down on the review process, eliminate critical hearings, and expedite the licensing process. The highest standards of public health and safety cannot be sacrificed for the sake of rushing projects through. This is a recipe for careless mistakes that could lead to unnecessary disasters. So, I look forward to the conversation before us today, and hope the majority will work with us to address some of our concerns and incorporate the feedback we hear today.

With that, I yield back.