

**Chair Cathy McMorris Rodgers**  
**Opening Statement — Subcommittee on Energy, Climate, and Grid Security: “American Nuclear Energy Expansion: Spent Fuel Policy and Innovation”**  
**April 10, 2024**  
*As prepared for delivery*

Nuclear energy technologies are essential for our national security, and a cleaner and more secure energy future.

It is exciting to see how the promise of innovative nuclear technologies can help support the energy demands of a growing economy, for industry, for manufacturing, and for the American people.

This Congress, it’s been encouraging to see a renewed, bipartisan focus on restoring American technological leadership in nuclear energy.

Energy and Commerce has a rich history of leading on these issues.

Our work this Congress has been no exception.

We’ve advanced solutions to lay the foundation for a more robust and innovative nuclear industry with strong, bi-partisan House votes that underscore the wide support for these policies.

This includes legislation that will support the production of the innovative advanced fuels needed for new types of nuclear reactors currently under development.

Our work has also included measures to make sure Russia will not be able to undermine our supply chain by seeking to bolster our domestic fuel manufacturing.

That bill, H.R. 1042, the Prohibiting Russian Uranium Imports Act, passed the House by a unanimous vote – and I’m hopeful we can get it signed into law soon.

Our agenda has also included the Atomic Energy Advancement Act, led by Chair Duncan and Ranking Member DeGette, that will provide the most consequential reforms to nuclear regulation in decades...

...and, with continued partnership with the Senate, many of those policies should soon be on their way to enactment.

Today we turn to examining spent nuclear fuel policy.

By all accounts, the Nuclear Waste Policy Act, which governs both spent nuclear fuel and high-level nuclear waste generally, is long overdue to be implemented to address the needs of today’s industry.

The program has been stalled for over a decade, as a direct result of actions by opponents to the Yucca Mountain Project, the designated storage facility for spent nuclear fuel.

These unfortunate actions have undermined the law and poisoned public trust in how we manage spent nuclear fuel for far too long...

...and have jeopardized efforts to manage defense obligations for things like navy fuels and the cleanup of legacy Cold War sites, like the Hanford site just outside of my district in Eastern Washington.

As we will hear in testimony this morning, this opposition is not safety-related or technical... it's political.

Opposition from states like Nevada in particular to this program has inhibited Congressional appropriations and driven the Executive branch to dismantle what had been an otherwise technically successful program...

This program, if allowed to move forward, would provide the public information that's critical to earning people's support and trust for nuclear energy.

This committee took steps in 2018 to get the licensing program for Yucca Mountain back on track with a reform package that culminated in a very strong bipartisan House vote.

While those efforts ultimately failed in the Senate, they proved that it is possible to build bipartisan support for a durable spent fuel program, which is what brings us here today.

To secure American nuclear leadership, we must continue the Committee's work to update the law and build state support for a permanent repository at Yucca Mountain.

Our conversation this morning will also highlight the prospects of a growing fleet of nuclear reactors and how, by utilizing innovative technologies, we can improve the management of spent nuclear fuel in the U.S.

Innovative companies like Curio and Oklo are already developing innovative technologies that will enhance the use of energy from spent fuels.

We should be building on this work to ensure America's dominance for the next century.

By embracing American technology and innovation, we can ensure nuclear energy benefits communities across the country and around the world.

American leadership matters.

Failure to lead will result in the international civilian nuclear markets being dominated by our adversaries, like China and Russia...

....which undermines our energy security and nuclear safety.

These goals should be bipartisan and I look forward to discussing how this committee can help ensure the U.S. wins the future and restores our nuclear leadership.

Thank you to our witnesses for being here today. I yield back.

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