

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 “The Fiscal Year 2025 Nuclear Regulatory Commission Budget”

July 23, 2024

Thank you, Chair Duncan, and thank you to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) Commissioners for being here today. As the agency responsible for overseeing our nation’s nuclear fleet and radioactive materials, the work the NRC does is vital not only to our nation’s overall energy security, but to the health and safety of the American people as well.

I’m honored to have worked collaboratively with Chair Duncan, along with Chair McMorris Rodges and Ranking Member Pallone, to support the NRC’s mission. As we recently stood together in the Oval Office to watch President Biden sign the ADVANCE Act into law, I couldn’t help but feel pride at what we accomplished together.

During my years in Congress and on this committee, this bill stands out as one of the most successful examples of bipartisanship I’ve had the pleasure of working on. Chair Duncan and my fellow members of this subcommittee conducted themselves with tremendous shared purpose, which you can see in our success.

One of my main contributions to the ADVANCE Act came via H.R. 4528 - The Strengthening the NRC Workforce Act. Currently, one-third of NRC’s staff are eligible for retirement. This bill provides NRC with the authority to direct hire, hiring and performance bonus authority and offer alternative compensation, as we granted to FERC back in the bipartisan Energy Act of 2020. To fully realize the potential of nuclear power, we must ensure the long-term future of its workforce. I’m proud to have played a key role in making this a reality.

As I’ve said previously, nuclear power is not a silver bullet. But if we’re going to get to net zero carbon emissions by 2050, it must be part of the mix. Currently, nuclear energy is responsible for producing 20% of all the electricity generated in this country, and nearly half of all the carbon-free electricity the U.S. generates each year. Experts agree nuclear energy has the potential to play a significant role in our efforts to drive down our nation’s greenhouse gas emissions as we take on the climate crisis.

As we work to reduce our emissions from the U.S. energy sector and make the clean energy transition, nuclear energy is a key technology that can be used to continue providing the American people with the power they need.

But it has been my steadfast opinion we can only do that if we continue to prioritize public health and safety. It goes without saying the bill we passed out of committee law threads that needle. I’m

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honored to say this subcommittee has streamlined the nuclear regulatory process while doing so in a way that will continue to ensure the highest level of public health and safety.

Given the additional tools and authorities we have provided to the NRC, I'm excited to hear about the agency's timeline for implementation for this valuable legislation. The world can't wait. I believe there is a real opportunity to drive down our emissions and accelerate our clean-energy transition through the increased use of nuclear power – but we need to do it in the right way.

That includes the need for the development of a strategy to dispose of spent fuel, because we can't lose sight of the issue of dealing with spent nuclear waste. We need to find a storage solution for nuclear waste that does not abandon the communities that host nuclear reactors whether that is through reprocessing, permanent storage, or some combination.

Right now, spent fuel is stored at 75 different sites in 33 different states across our country, including 23 sites that are no longer operating. The Nuclear Waste Policy Act called for a permanent waste repository to be set up by 1998. Well, here we are in 2024 and we still don't have a permanent solution. I look forward to the discussion we are going to have today, and I yield back.