

Chair Jeff Duncan
**Opening Statement—Subcommittee on Energy, Climate, and Grid
Security:**
“The Fiscal Year 2025 Nuclear Regulatory Commission Budget”
July 23, 2024
As prepared for delivery

Good morning, and let me welcome the four Commissioners of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) – Chairman Hanson, Commissioner Wright, Commissioner Caputo, and Commissioner Crowell.

You all are responsible for ensuring the NRC performs its mission, appropriately, to meet the laws and policies enacted by Congress.

That is reflected in your guidance to the Commission, your policy making, your leadership.

It is also reflected in how the staff performs, the judgments and decisions they make to advance the mission.

This may be seen in several ways, such as...

... in budgeting,

...in the decisions for timing and resources to do license reviews, and

...in the approach to new and novel licensing challenges, like new factory-built reactors.

We look forward to discussing this with you today.

It is an exciting time in nuclear energy— all evidence shows we are on the precipice of a new nuclear renaissance.

Nuclear energy plays a critical and growing role in providing reliable power, enhancing energy security and our American global leadership.

Nuclear energy is clean. And advancing nuclear energy keeps our engineering and technology base sharp and focused on atomic innovations – a boon to the nation’s security, and innovative spirit.

This Congress, and particularly the Energy and Commerce Committee, has been united and ambitious in advancing durable and bipartisan policy that will expand nuclear energy and its many benefits for the nation.

Our goal has been to bring America’s nuclear promise back into alignment with the goals that Congress established when passing the Atomic Energy Act.

This goal came to fruition in the bipartisan, bicameral nuclear energy package that was signed into law by President Biden on July 9, 2024.

This package passed with overwhelming bipartisan support--as the Atomic Energy Advancement Act in the House and the ADVANCE Act in the Senate.

While we are proud of this effort, enacting a law really is just the first step to realizing nuclear energy's promise.

The burden now shifts to you, and the Commission staff to implement the law.

And I hope you and the staff understand, we're not enacting laws just to validate what you are doing now.

We're enacting laws to drive you to improve and perform at a new level – a level that is needed for a modern regulatory to provide the certainty that will unleash nuclear innovations.

In recent years, we've witnessed plenty of examples of the NRC failing to be an efficient, thoughtful regulator.

At your budget hearing last year, we talked about the unacceptable pace of subsequent licenses reviews, we talked about the failure of the staff to respond to Congressional direction in the formation of new regulations for advanced reactors.

These appeared to be symptoms of deeper failures, despite progress on some fronts, which is worrisome if NRC is going to perform its mission efficiently going forward. These failures must be addressed.

The ADVANCE Act requires you, the NRC Commissioners, to take the lead and clarify the agency's mission.

This is so that all understand your licensing and regulation must be efficient and will not unnecessarily limit deployment of nuclear technology or the benefits of nuclear energy to the public.

Congress placed the burden on you, the leaders of the Commission, to ensure staff leadership and line staff get the message. And we will hold you to account for ensuring that happens.

Many provisions of this new law seek to align NRC licensing and oversight activity with Congress's goals of advancing nuclear energy.

The ADVANCE Act policies reflect the responses from stakeholders and information developed in our oversight, including in multiple Committee hearings.

Our goal was to identify what is needed to create a better functioning regulator that can provide reasonable assurance of adequate protection of public health and safety while also not inhibiting the benefits of nuclear power.

In the new law, we press NRC to lean in and fast track licensing at Brownfields and retired fossil sites, expedite the review of combined licensing applications, continue to modernize environmental reviews, and more.

We require you to reduce licensing costs for advanced reactors, encourage US nuclear exports, and support advanced nuclear fuel concepts.

With energy demand growing fast, especially to provide power for data centers and AI, the need for more nuclear power is increasing...as is the need for a regulator prepared to meet the growing volume of applications and advancements in technologies.

I look forward to discussing today how we can be sure NRC is ready for this future.