

Committee on Energy and Commerce

Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery of Full Committee Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr.

Hearing on “The Fiscal Year 2025 Nuclear Regulatory Commission Budget”

July 23, 2024

Nuclear energy is the single largest source of clean energy in the United States, and it will continue to play a vital role in ensuring our grid is clean, reliable, and affordable as the clean energy transition continues.

This Congress, we’ve made critical, bipartisan progress on important nuclear policies. We’ve taken several major actions, including passing the Russian uranium ban, the Nuclear Fuel Security Act, and the ADVANCE Act. All of this builds upon the important support for nuclear energy that Democrats passed when we were in the majority. The Energy Act of 2020, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, and the Inflation Reduction Act all included historic investments in our existing and future nuclear infrastructure, up and down the supply chain.

And these investments are working. A lifeline from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law will keep the Diablo Canyon Power Plant in California alive, and a loan from the Inflation Reduction Act is going to prove pivotal in restarting the Palisades Nuclear Plant in Michigan, which is going to bring back about 1,000 jobs to that state. And, it was loan guarantees from the Department of Energy that were instrumental in getting two new reactors at the Vogtle site in Georgia across the finish line.

I hope that Committee Republicans are paying attention to how important these investments are and will reconsider their effort to repeal the nuclear power production tax credit from earlier this year. If we want the nuclear industry to grow and continue to provide clean, baseload electricity, we can’t go back on our word and repeal vital resources.

This is something Republicans should consider as they continue to push Project 2025 – a blueprint for a potential second Trump administration. Trump’s Project 2025 is a plan to consolidate power in the White House, gut checks and balances, and eliminate the independence of agencies like the NRC. It contains radical proposals that would gut the Department of Energy’s ability to invest in the nuclear industry, calling for the dissolution of the Loan Programs Office that has funded massive infrastructure projects, and dissolving the Office of Nuclear Energy. These proposals are not good for the deployment of clean and safe nuclear energy, and they’re not good for the country. They’re only good for the radical ideologues pushing Trump’s Project 2025, and it’s a way for the extreme right wing to take control over Americans’ lives and freedoms.

Moving to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, I’m looking forward to hearing from the Commissioners on how they plan to implement the ADVANCE Act, which President Biden signed into law earlier this month. Democratic members of the Committee led a number of important provisions in the law, including those to make it easier for the NRC to hire and retain staff, waive fees for developers of advanced reactors, and clarify fusion energy regulations.

Critically, the ADVANCE Act manages to improve the licensing processes for advanced reactors without compromising on safety. I want to repeat that – the ADVANCE Act does not alter the

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Commission's safety focus in any way whatsoever. The NRC has a long-standing commitment to protect public health and safety, and that continues to be the case. Discussions of licensing advanced nuclear reactors in a timely fashion are important, but the improvements we made in the ADVANCE Act did not in any way impact NRC's core mission of protecting public health and safety.

I also want to note – as I have before with other commissions within our Committee's jurisdiction – that independent regulatory commissions work best when they are at their full complement of commissioners. Chair Hanson, I was pleased that the Senate recently re-confirmed you to a five-year term, but the NRC has been down a commissioner for over a year now. That's not good for anyone, and I hope the Commission can be back up to full strength soon.

With that, I look forward to hearing more from the Commissioners today on implementation of the ADVANCE Act and other critical areas within the NRC's jurisdiction. I thank you all for being here today and I yield back the balance of my time.