

Committee on Energy and Commerce

**Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Subcommittee on Energy Ranking Member Kathy Castor**

Hearing on “Nuclear Permitting Reform: Legislation to Advance Efficient Licensing”

June 9, 2026

This committee has a strong history of bipartisan work to modernize the ways we license new nuclear reactors – carefully balancing safety, transparency, and efficiency. Unfortunately, the Trump Administration’s reckless and heavy-handed approach has taken us backwards – resulting in a federal government that is less trustworthy and less capable of fulfilling the duties that Congress envisioned when we passed the bipartisan ADVANCE Act in 2024.

The President illegally fired NRC Chairman Chris Hanson last June. Other NRC commissioners have sat in front of this Committee and warned they could be fired at any time by the President if they refuse to rubber-stamp a nuclear reactor.

Republicans have been silent as DOGE-affiliated staff with no experience in nuclear safety have forced out career safety experts. The NRC has lost nearly 500 staff since Trump took office. We also can’t forget that NRC licensing is just one piece of the federal government’s role in promoting the deployment of advanced nuclear energy.

DOE’s Office of Clean Energy Demonstrations has deployed \$2.8 billion from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law for advanced nuclear projects; however, the U.S. Government Accountability Office says that DOE is no longer capable of effectively managing those funds due to staffing cuts.

The Loan Programs Office, which was providing low-cost financing for nuclear reactor construction, lost more than half of its employees to voluntary resignation. Plus, even if a nuclear energy project can get licensed, financed, and built, it still faces challenges interconnecting to the grid. The Department of Energy keeps making moves that heap higher costs on hardworking Americans at every turn – like forcing old coal plants to remain open – even when plant operators are moving toward closure. Economically, that hurts nuclear power that could replace that coal with more reliable energy.

It’s part of a troubling pattern, where Republicans have supported nuclear energy in theory, but failed to follow through as soon as nuclear power starts to compete with dirty fuels. GOP policies are just making life more expensive at every turn. The President’s own Energy Information Administration has told us what energy will come online this year – 86 GW of generation, made up of 51% solar, 28% batteries, 14% wind, and 7% gas. These are the energy

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resources that are poised to help America address higher costs and more reliable power, but the policies of Trump Administration and Republicans in Congress keep adding to the economic pain.

Mr. Chairman, the committee should schedule a hearing on the how the president's war in Iran is adding insult to injury due to the high cost of gasoline and the fact that the U.S. Strategic Petroleum Reserve is approaching its lowest levels in decades, with inventories expected to fall to roughly 300 million barrels – the lowest since the early 1980s. Nevertheless, some of the bills before us today can move us in the right direction. I appreciate the Chairman including my bill, the Department of Energy Nuclear Transparency Act, in today's hearing.

Over the past year, the Department has developed new authorization processes for research demonstration reactors, separate from the typical NRC licensing processes. The NRC has proposed giving DOE-approved reactors an accelerated licensing pathway. However, Secretary Wright has provided little information about how DOE will preserve safety and transparency in this new, fast-tracked process.

My bill ensures that Congress has appropriate oversight over these new processes, helping us ensure that we are using the most transparent safety standards, and boosting public confidence in the industry. This is something we can all agree on.

I have concerns with some of the bills that could limit important safeguards, as well as any attempts by this Administration to turn the NRC into a rubber stamp. I hope that my Republican colleagues will work with us address these issues. We also need to make progress on building a 21st century grid - particularly to permit and build new transmission lines. We can't afford to be complacent as our neighbors back home face soul-crushing energy costs and need our help.

I yield back.