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NUCLEAR PERMITTING REFORM:

LEGISLATION TO ADVANCE EFFICIENT LICENSING

TUESDAY, JUNE 9, 2026

House of Representatives,

Subcommittee on Energy,

Committee on Energy and Commerce,

Washington, D.C.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to call, at 10:15 a.m., in Room 2123, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Robert E. Latta [chairman of the subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Latta, Weber, Palmer, Allen, Balderson, Pfluger, Harshbarger, Miller-Meeks, Bentz, Fry, Evans, Goldman, Fedorchak, Guthrie (ex officio), Castor, Peters, Menendez, McClellan, Matsui, Tonko, Veasey, Schrier, Fletcher, Ocasio-Cortez, Auchincloss, and Pallone (ex officio).

Also Present: Representatives Griffith and Joyce.

Staff Present: Ansley Boylan, Director of Operations; Jessica Donlon, General Counsel; Andrew Furman, Professional Staff Member, Energy; Sydney Greene, Director, Finance and Logistics; Calvin Huggins, Clerk, Energy; Megan Jackson, Staff Director; AT Johnson, Special Advisor; Mary

Martin, Chief Counsel, Energy; Ben Mullaney, Press Secretary; Seth Ricketts, Clerk; Chris Sarley, Member Services/Stakeholder Director; Peter Spencer, Senior Professional Staff Member, Energy; Timothy Trimble, Staff Assistant; Matt VanHyfte, Communications Director; Jordan Antwi, Minority Intern; Keegan Cardman, Minority Staff Assistant; Devon Gorbey, Minority Environment Fellow; Waverly Gordon, Minority Deputy Staff Director and General Counsel; Alyssa Kimura, Minority Intern; Serena Klebba, Minority Intern; Brendan Lopez, Minority Press Assistant; Kristopher Pittard, Minority Professional Staff Member; Emma Roehrig, Minority Staff Assistant; Andrew Souvall, Minority Director of Communications, Outreach and Member Services; and Tuley Wright, Minority Staff Director, Energy.

Mr. Latta. Good morning. We will bring the Subcommittee on Energy to order, and the chair recognizes himself for 5 minutes for an opening statement.

Today's hearing will consider legislative proposals to improve the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's licensing process, among other reforms, which will help maintain momentum for U.S. nuclear development.

A robust and growing American nuclear industry is vital for our economy, energy, and national security. We need firm, reliable energy, and a lot more of it. We also need a robust nuclear sector for our national security. We must increase nuclear commerce with our allies and provide a more cost-effective industrial base.

This committee has already taken significant steps that will optimize the regulatory system and related policies to assist nuclear deployment and the economic and security benefits for the Nation. Our bipartisan work over the last 2 years led to the ADVANCE Act. This law directed the NRC to align its mission for enabling benefits of nuclear technology and to focus on energy, reducing costs, and increasing predictability in the permitting process.

Our work also laid the foundation for a revitalized domestic nuclear fuel sector. The Nuclear Fuel Security Act, which many of us on this dais helped develop and sponsor, provided Federal support and market incentives to grow our nuclear fuel industry and eliminate Russia's strategic choke-hold over global fuel supplies.

As these important laws have been implemented, it has become clear that additional updates may be helpful to achieve these goals.

The bills under consideration this morning provide additional practical reforms so to the permitting process can be more efficient while safety is protected and transparency for the public is assured. We will consider the bipartisan H.R. 5549, the Efficient Nuclear Licensing Hearing Act, sponsored by my colleagues from Virginia's Ninth, Washington's Eighth, and Texas' 33rd Congressional Districts. This would save time and resources by eliminating an outdated

requirement that NRC hold a final public hearing on a license even if no one requests that hearing.

H.R. 3978, the Nuclear REFUEL Act, which I led with my colleague from California's 50th District, will clarify certain recycling facilities may be licensed under the same regulatory framework as other fuel cycle facilities.

Recently, several of us visited a fuel recycling facility in northern France to have a better sense of the potential for this technology in the United States. This legislation will result in efficient permitting changes to extract additional energy out of used fuel.

H.R. 9084, the Department of Energy Nuclear Transparency Act, introduced last week by the ranking member of the Energy Subcommittee, would require DOE to announce and post licensing decisions for facilities it permits, similar to what NRC already does.

We will also review several discussion drafts that should attract bipartisan support. We will consider the Nuclear Advisory Committee Reform Act, which directs this important advisory committee to focus on issues that are new and safety significant to reduce unnecessary time on routine licensing by the NRC. This is in keeping with the bipartisan goals of the ADVANCE Act to be risk-informed and efficient when reviewing licenses.

The American Enrichment Development Act brings the licensing process for enrichment facilities in line with the permitting process for other fuel cycle facilities. It is a critical step to assure efficiency in licensing as we work to build out critical fuel supply infrastructure.

Finally, the NRC Staff Pay Alignment Act would update the Atomic Energy Act to align the pay authority applicable to certain career SES employees with the pay authorities Congress provided in the ADVANCE Act. Maintaining experienced and competent leadership at the NRC is essential for assuring it carries out its mission.

Our witnesses this morning, all of whom have provided their expert views to the committee in the past, will provide helpful perspective to these legislative proposals. We welcome back Maria Korsnick, a former chief nuclear officer and plant operator, who heads the Nuclear Energy Institute;

Jeff Merrifield, a former NRC Commissioner, who is speaking on behalf of the U.S. Nuclear Infrastructure Council; also, Kathryn Huff, a professor at the University of Illinois, who was an Assistant Secretary of Nuclear Energy at DOE in the last administration; and Jeremy Harrell, who heads the ClearPath Action, a leading energy policy advocacy organization that has helped inform bipartisan reforms.

I look forward to today's testimony, and, with that, I yield back and recognize the gentlelady from Florida, the ranking member of the subcommittee, for 5 minutes for an opening statement.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Latta follows:]

******** COMMITTEE INSERT ********

Ms. Castor. Well, thank you, Chairman Latta, and good morning. Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

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 backward, resulting in a Federal enterprise that is less trustworthy and less capable of fulfilling the progress 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 appeared before our committee and warned that they could be fired at any time by the President if they refused to rubber-stamp a nuclear reactor.

Republicans have been silent as DOGE-affiliated interlopers with no experience in nuclear safety have forced out career safety experts. The NRC has lost nearly 500 professional staff since the President 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 Government Accountability Office says that DOE is no longer capable of effectively managing those funds due to the staffing cuts.

The Loan Programs Office, which was providing low-cost financing for nuclear reactor construction, lost more than half of its employees due to voluntary resignation as well. Plus, even if a nuclear energy project can get licensed, financed, and built, it still faces challenges connecting to the grid.

The Department of Energy keeps making moves that waste taxpayer money and heap higher costs on our neighbors back home, like forcing old coal plants to remain open even when plant operators are moving toward closure. Economically, that hurts nuclear power that could replace

coal with more reliable energy.

The U.S. Energy Information Administration advises what energy will come online this year: 86 gigawatts of generation made up of 51 percent solar, 28 percent batteries, 14 percent wind, and 7 percent gas. These are the energy resources that are poised to help America address higher costs and provide more reliable power. We need all of those resources now in addition to nuclear power.

Mr. Chairman, there is a lot of economic pain out in the world, and I think this committee should schedule a hearing on how the President's war in Iran is taking the cost of gasoline to sky-high levels 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 1980s.

Notwithstanding all that, some of the bills before this committee today can move us in the right direction. I appreciate the chairman including my bill, the Department of Energy Nuclear Transparency Act. Over the past year, the Department has developed new authorization processes for research demonstration reactors, separate from the typical NRC licensing process.

The NRC has proposed giving DOE approved reactors, an accelerated licensing pathway. However, Secretary Wright has provided little information on how DOE will preserve safety and transparency in this new fast-track process.

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

I have concerns with some of the bills that could limit important safeguards, as well as any attempts by the administration to turn the NRC into a rubber stamp. I hope that our colleagues will work with us to 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, and our neighbors back home are facing soul-crushing energy cost increases, and this committee holds the keys to helping them and

providing relief, more reliable, affordable power that they deserve.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I yield back.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Castor follows:]

******** COMMITTEE INSERT ********

Mr. Latta. Thank you. The gentlelady yields back.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Kentucky, the chairman of the full committee, for 5 minutes for an opening statement.

The Chair. Thanks, Mr. Chairman. Thanks for having this hearing, and thanks to our witnesses for being here.

This past Friday, the Energy Information Administration reported that China's nuclear capacity nearly doubled over 10 years, adding 30 gigawatts of power since 2016. While impressive, as recently as 30 years ago, the United States built 80 gigawatts of nuclear power in 14 years, doubled the pace of China's, and that pace has not yet been surpassed. Given our urgent energy security and power needs, we should want to return to that pace: six new reactors a year or more.

As with other Federal permitting processes, the nuclear licensing process itself should not be the major impediment to building worthy projects. It should not unnecessarily delay the benefits of the projects for the public.

Today, this subcommittee will examine legislation that adds to the bipartisan permitting reforms of the ADVANCE Act we passed 2 years ago. Those reforms aim to improve nuclear permitting so the public can safely enjoy the benefits of nuclear faster and sooner. The goal is to make sure NRC licensing is efficient, predictable, and timely, and that its overall culture is aligned to maximize the benefits of nuclear for society, for our energy, our security, and our health.

On all accounts, we are on the right track. The NRC is updating its regulations of environmental reviews to cut months and even years off its licensing processes. It is working to focus on the most safety-significant matters and to discard procedures and requirements that take time and resources but do not have meaningful impact on safety.

The Trump administration has helped to accelerate the ADVANCE Act reforms, updating NRC regulations across the board with a central focus on what is necessary for NRC to efficiently perform its core safety mission.

The bills before us today clarify pay authority, provide transparency, and eliminate unnecessary Atomic Energy Act requirements to ensure licensing runs more smoothly. The result is a single-step process for operating permits, the ability to rely on updated environmental reviews, and the ability to move fast on well-understood technologies.

Let me welcome the witnesses and all who have brought their experience and expertise on these topics to this panel and in the past, and I look forward to the discussion, and I will yield back.

[The prepared statement of The Chair follows:]

******** COMMITTEE INSERT ********

Mr. Latta. Well, thank you very much. The gentleman yields back the balance of his time.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from New Jersey, the ranking member of the full committee, for 5 minutes for an opening statement.

Mr. Pallone. Thank you, Chairman Latta.

This is our third hearing this year on nuclear energy, and I must, again, start by noting the Trump administration's troubling attacks on the safety of our Nation's nuclear reactors. The President claims to support nuclear energy, but his administration's actions, whether carried out by the Department of Energy or his DOGE minions at the Nuclear Regulatory Commission seem designed to make nuclear energy less safe.

There is no path forward for the nuclear industry in this Nation unless there is public confidence in its safety, and the industry and its regulators have worked hard to invest in that public confidence over the years, but President Trump has completely jeopardized these decades of work in just 18 months.

Any nuclear legislation that we consider must acknowledge that reality, and that is why I am pleased that Ranking Member Castor's bill, the Department of Energy Nuclear Transparency Act, is among the bills we are discussing today. This is a critically important bill considering the administration's concerning actions on nuclear energy.

Last year, President Trump issued an executive order directing DOE to authorize three test reactors and get them operational this year by the Nation's 250th birthday. In response, DOE created the so-called Reactor Pilot Program, which they began marketing as a first pass, if you will, or a fast pass to any NRC license. And let me be clear: DOE has no authority to issue a fast pass to an NRC license, but that is not stopping them from trying to.

And then, last week, DOE announced that the first reactor from the program had achieved a self-sustaining nuclear reaction, and that announcement was, effectively, the first public signal from the Department on the progress of the program.

A nuclear reactor licensed by the NRC would have had a license made available to the public for anyone to read, or should have, and while DOE has authorized safety analysis for these reactors, they are not available anywhere for public inspection.

So DOE also failed to publicly announce when Secretary Wright gave final approval to authorize this first test reactor, and while these actions do not mean that there is anything wrong with this individual reactor that achieved an important milestone last week, we simply have no idea about the rigor or quality of work that went into evaluating its safety. We wouldn't find this at all acceptable with a commercial nuclear reactor. So why should we find it acceptable for a test reactor either?

Ranking Member Castor's bill would create critical transparency safeguards to ensure that safety analysis, final approvals, and the rules of the road for these reactors are made public.

The NRC has been a model for transparency since Chairman Nieh took the reins, but we must ensure that DOE follows in the NRC's footsteps, and that is a commonsense idea that I would hope we could all agree on.

Now, earlier this year, I said that it would be difficult for us to move forward on nuclear legislation while public confidence in our Nation's nuclear fleet have been called into question. Advancing Ranking Member Castor's bill helps address many of my concerns.

While some of the bills before us today are well-intentioned attempts to ensure that the NRC's licensing process works smoothly for all kinds of advanced nuclear technologies, I do have concerns with one draft bill in particular that I hope our Republicans will work with us on. That is the Nuclear Advisory Committee Reform Act. It sharply limits the role of the Advisory Committee on Reactor Safeties, or ACRS, which provides a valuable, independent, technical perspective to the NRC and NRC licenses throughout the licensing process.

So I am open to ways to make the work of the ACRS more efficient and encourage them to focus on the highest priority reviews, but I am uncomfortable, essentially, I am uncomfortable with

the approach currently taken by that draft bill, which would prevent the ACRS from providing feedback on a license application unless explicitly requested by the NRC, even if the advisory committee itself felt that its review would be important.

So I am uncomfortable with that approach given the fact that the Trump administration has already targeted the ACRS, attempting to reduce its size and limit its function.

So I hope we can find a bipartisan path forward on the proposed fleet of bills before us today. Mr. Chairman, I mean, obviously, our major concern is safety, safety of nuclear reactors, and I am just going to repeat again that, if we don't have that confidence in the safety, then moving forward with many of these reactors is going to be a problem.

So, with that, I yield back the balance of my time, Mr. Chairman.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Pallone follows:]

******** COMMITTEE INSERT ********

Mr. Latta. Well, thank you very much. The gentleman yields back the balance of his time.

And, before proceeding to our witnesses, I would like just a point of personal privilege. I would like to welcome members of Parliament from the United Kingdom who are here with the British-American Parliamentary Exchange this week. They are here for the next couple of days to discuss shared economic security foreign policy priorities, including nuclear energy, and, just by coincidence, that is what we are talking about today. So we welcome you. Thanks so much for joining us today.

This concludes member opening statements. The chair reminds members that, pursuant to committee rules, all members' opening statements will be made part of the record.

Again, we want to thank our witnesses for appearing before the committee today to testify. Each witness will have the opportunity to give an opening statement, followed by a round of questions from our members.

Our witnesses today include Ms. Maria Korsnick, the president and CEO of the Nuclear Energy Institute; Mr. Jeremy Harrell, CEO of ClearPath Action; the Honorable Kathryn Huff, the associate professor and director of Advanced Reactor Fuel Cycles Laboratory at the University of Illinois; and the Honorable Jeffrey Merrifield, Chair of the Board of Directors, United States Nuclear Industrial Council. So thank you. Again, we appreciate you all being here.

Before we get started, just a couple of quick housekeeping. Make sure that the mic is pulled up close to you. You will notice you will have 4 minutes when it is green. It turns yellow when you are down to about 1 minute, and then red. So we appreciate you watching those lights.

Ms. Korsnick, you are recognized for 5 minutes for an opening statement. Again, thanks for being with us today.

STATEMENTS OF MARIA KORSNICK, PRESIDENT AND CEO, NUCLEAR ENERGY INSTITUTE; JEREMY HARRELL, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, CLEARPATH; AND KATHRYN HUFF, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS; And JEFFREY MERRIFIELD, CHAIR OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS, U.S. NUCLEAR INDUSTRY COUNCIL.

STATEMENT OF MARIA KORSNICK

Ms. Korsnick. Great. Thank you, Chairman Guthrie, Ranking Member Pallone, subcommittee Chairman Latta, and Ranking Member Castor, and members of the subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. The nuclear industry is appreciative of the committee's continued leadership.

When I appeared before the subcommittee in January, I described a nuclear industry entering a period of renewed growth and national importance, and since then, momentum has increased significantly. Congress and the administration have taken important steps to modernize regulation, strengthen domestic nuclear capabilities, and support deployment at home and abroad.

Utilities, developers, manufacturers, labor, and investors are responding with new partnerships, capital commitments, investments, and increased generation. These developments reflect growing recognition of nuclear's essential role in providing reliable, affordable electricity. Our existing fleet of 94 reactors provides nearly one-fifth of America's electricity and more than 40 percent of its clean generation. They are the most energy secure assets on the grid and economic anchors in communities across our country.

Advanced reactor projects are moving from demonstration to construction. Utilities are pursuing license renewals, power uprates, plant restarts, and new builds. Growing numbers of technology and industrial companies are looking to nuclear for that reliable always-on power.

The challenge before us now is no longer whether nuclear energy can play a larger role. It is how we move from promising first projects to repeatable deployment. To accomplish that, your continued leadership is needed in six areas: First, regulatory modernization. The industry's commitment to safety is unwavering and non-negotiable.

Modernization focuses regulatory attention on safety-significant issues while improving predictability and efficiency. The foundation laid by Congress through NEIMA and the ADVANCE Act, paired with the executive actions, is delivering measurable results. Continued focus is necessary to ensure those reforms are fully implemented and endure. The Efficient Nuclear Licensing Hearings Act and the Nuclear Advisory Committee Reform Act can help further this.

Second: Addressing early-mover risk. The principal barrier to large-scale deployment today is not technology. It is managing the cost and schedule risk associated with early projects. Targeted Federal risk sharing can help unlock private investment and establish a pipeline for deployment at scale.

We know that building at scale drives cost down when early lessons inform future projects. The Department of Energy Nuclear Transparency Act would help ensure lessons learned from DOE projects are shared.

Third: Strengthening the domestic nuclear fuel cycle. Congress had made important investments in the nuclear fuel cycle. Timely implementation is critical to reduce reliance on adversarial suppliers. The American Enrichment Deployment Act can help accelerate domestic enrichment capacity and strengthen U.S. nuclear fuel security.

Fourth: Workforce and supply chain readiness. Deploying nuclear energy at scale will require skilled workers, expanding manufacturing, qualified suppliers, and predictable project pipelines. Continued collaboration among all stakeholders will be key to ensuring projects can be delivered on time and at reasonable cost.

Likewise, the NRC needs to ensure adequate staffing with the technical expertise and

regulatory experience necessary to sustain modernization. The NRC Staff Pay Alignment Act can help further this objective.

Fifth, establishing a durable used fuel management strategy. Used fuel is being managed safely and securely today. Your leadership is needed to establish a durable path forward. The REFUEL Act reflects an important effort to facilitate development of recycling technologies that can be part of an integrated solution.

Sixth: Strengthening U.S. competitiveness and global leadership. Backed by State financing and government support, Russia continues to aggressively export nuclear technology while China is on track to surpass the U.S. in nuclear generating capacity by 2030. To remain competitive, the U.S. must successfully deploy new nuclear projects at home, demonstrating the viability of these to international customers.

We must act now to offer allies and partners credible alternative to State-owned competitors and ensure the next generation of nuclear energy is deployed with the highest standards of safety, security, and non-proliferation. It is a national security imperative.

The challenge now is how quickly and effectively we can build on the progress already underway. NEI and its members stand ready to work with this committee to strengthen domestic nuclear capability, deliver the safe, reliable, and affordable energy that America needs.

Thank you and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Korsnick follows:]

******** COMMITTEE INSERT ********

Mr. Latta. Well, thank you very much for your opening statement.

Mr. Harrell, you are recognized for 5 minutes for your opening statement.

STATEMENT OF JEREMY HARRELL

Mr. Harrell. Thank you, Chairman Latta, Chairman Guthrie, Ranking Member Castor, Ranking Member Pallone, and members of the committee, and thank you for the opportunity to testify before the committee today. My name is Jeremy Harrell, and I am the chief executive officer of ClearPath Action.

Seven years ago, the U.S. was shutting down nuclear reactors. Today, we are restarting and building them. This committee deserves real credit for that. Years of bipartisan congressional work, such as NEIMA and the ADVANCE Act, accompanied by action from the White House, the Department of Energy, DOW, and the NRC, are putting policy into action and steel into the ground.

Right now, Kairos is building reactors in Tennessee. Just last week, Antares was the first reactor to go critical under the Reactor Pilot Program at Idaho National Lab. Last month, our team was in Idaho in anticipation of the first test at the DOME facility at the Nuclear Reactor Innovation Center, a facility that finished a full year ahead of schedule.

Earlier this year, TerraPower received its construction permit and broke ground on its reactor in Wyoming. In under 12 months, X-energy completed its environmental review in Texas. Enrichment investments totaling billions of dollars are moving forward in Ohio, Kentucky, Tennessee, and New Mexico, and there are three major reactor restarts underway in Michigan, Iowa, and Pennsylvania, adding over 2 gigawatts of reliable clean power.

These projects show that America's nuclear sector is not just talking about deployment. New nuclear is happening.

Today, I will cover four themes: One, the importance of a predictable, efficient regulator;

two, the growing portfolio of nuclear projects advancing toward deployment; three, how legislation before this committee supports continued growth; and, four, the role a strong domestic nuclear industry plays in enhancing U.S. competitiveness on the global stage.

For capital-intensive projects like nuclear, regulatory uncertainty is an investment risk. When developers and investors cannot rely on clear timelines and stable expectations, projects stall or never get off the ground.

The NRC must be ready to capitalize on this unique moment. That is why the legislation before this committee matters. These are practical, targeted proposals that compliment everything you all have already accomplished. Each bill addresses a specific opportunity to further modernize the process without compromising safety.

The Efficient Nuclear Licensing Hearings Act removes the requirement to hold an uncontested mandatory hearing. These hearings unnecessarily require upwards of 1,500 hours of NRC staff preparation, cost applicants up to millions of dollars, and delay approvals by an average of 6 months.

The REFUEL Act clarifies the regulatory pathway for reprocessing technologies, which are more proliferation resistant. This supports U.S. fuel security and has the potential to reduce taxpayer liabilities on spent fuel.

The DOE Nuclear Transparency Act seeks to provide transparency into the Department of Energy's authorization process for certain test reactors. The Nuclear Advisory Committee Reform Act refocuses the ACRS on novel safety-significant issues directly related to reactor design rather than mandating its review of every licensing proceeding. This focuses these technical experts on what matters most.

The American Enrichment Deployment Act allows new enrichment facilities to begin construction while simultaneously pursuing their NRC license, potentially saving 12 to 18 months. Nearly $3 billion in task orders have already been issued to establish three domestic commercial-scale enrichment facilities. This bill helps them get built faster.

The NRC Staff Pay Alignment Act ensures the Commission can compete for top talent as the market for nuclear expertise becomes increasingly competitive.

These are the right next steps, and they work best when pursued in a bipartisan way. Bipartisan policy is durable policy, and durable policy is what gives companies and investors what is needed to commit and drive forward our Nation's nuclear future with confidence.

I would like to make one final point. This is a strategic moment. The nations that build and export the next generation of nuclear technology will shape global energy markets and geopolitical influence for decades. China and Russia are working aggressively to dominate those markets.

Every reactor we build, every license we issue, and every domestic fuel facility we bring online strengthens America's hand in that competition.

Thank you again for your leadership and for the opportunity to testify today. I look forward to the discussion.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Harrell follows:]

******** COMMITTEE INSERT ********

Mr. Latta. Well, thank you very much for your opening statement.

Dr. Huff, you are recognized for 5 minutes for your opening statement.

STATEMENT OF KATHRYN HUFF

Ms. Huff. Thank you, Chairman Guthrie, Chairman Latta, Ranking Member Pallone, and Ranking Member Castor. I appear before you today in my personal capacity. I am delighted to be with the distinguished members of this committee, and my testimony does not represent the official policy opinion of the University of Illinois system.

My perspective combines the technical research that I do in advanced nuclear reactors and their fuel cycles with some experience as the Assistant Secretary for Nuclear Energy in DOE. In that role, I worked very closely with Congress, industry, the national laboratories, and the public, as well as international partners to advance reactor demonstrations, to move along the important work of this and other committees, and to implement efforts to accelerate the availability of high-assay low-enriched uranium, or HALEU.

The U.S. is experiencing a promising moment for innovation and nuclear energy. Advanced reactors are being demonstrated. Existing reactors are pursuing license renewals and uprates, and all of this growing electricity demand is increasing interest in reliable, carbon-free generation.

Bipartisan investments in fuel production, manufacturing capacity, and workforce development are helping to establish the foundations for this future growth, and the legislation before this committee does recognize that nuclear energy must play an important role in our climate future, our energy security, and our economic prosperity. Together, I think these bills raise a common question about how the United States can ensure that our institutions can support nuclear energy deployment while preserving public confidence.

The long-term success of nuclear energy will depend on not only technological innovation but

also that public confidence. Maintaining effective, transparent, trusted institutions is incredibly important. I believe the policies under discussion today are strongest when they do precisely that; when they strengthen regulatory effectiveness and transparency simultaneously.

The Nuclear REFUEL Act aims to provide regulatory clarity for nuclear fuel cycle technologies and facilities. There is merit in clarifying licensing pathways for innovative approaches that seek to recover additional value from spent nuclear fuel and improve the sustainability of this technology.

The American Enrichment Deployment Act would support development of additional domestic enrichment capacity, particularly for HALEU. Expanding domestic fuel cycle capability is really important for energy security and advanced reactor deployment, but at-risk construction activities should remain genuinely at the applicant's risk. I think it is really important that these applicants' investment not create pressure on regulators to make a particular decision with regard to their application.

The NRC Staff Pay Alignment Act addresses a really growing workforce challenge that I see daily. As a professor, when my students go out for jobs, they have multiple opportunities, even interns, and this needs to be reflected in a flexibility within the NRC to provide appropriate compensation at the highest levels for that technical expertise.

But workforce development cannot begin at hiring. It must also sustain the pipeline that requires kind of continued support for universities, fellowships, scholarships, community colleges, and workforce training programs that prepare the next generation of nuclear professionals. So I would recommend that, in concert with this, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission reflect on their pause of such grants last year.

The legislation concerning the Advisory Committee on Reactor Safeguards seeks to modernize one of the Nation's most important sources of independent reactor safety expertise. These efforts intend to focus resources on the most safety-significant matters, but Congress should seek to preserve that committee's independence particularly at a time when technical breadth over the last

many decades in the Commission of five Commissioners itself has declined somewhat.

Ultimately, draft legislation concerning Department of Energy transparency also is really important. I hold the Department of Energy in the highest regard, and we worked diligently during my time there to ensure that the public was brought fully on board with the actions that we were taking. I think that helped to set the groundwork for the enthusiasm around nuclear energy, and I would love to see more of that today.

As Congress considers these legislative packages, I am encouraged to see attention on institutions making durable deployment possible. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Huff follows:]

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Mr. Latta. Thank you very much for your opening statement.

Mr. Merrifield, you are recognized for 5 minutes for your opening statement.

STATEMENT OF JEFFREY MERRIFIELD

Mr. Merrifield. Chairman Latta, Ranking Member Castor, Chairman Guthrie, Ranking Member Pallone, and members of the subcommittee, it is an honor to testify before you today on the role that nuclear power can play in securing the clean, reliable, and resilient energy that we need to power our Nation's electric grid, decarbonize critical industrial capabilities, and power our Nation's increasing data demands.

I am here today in my role as the chairman of the U.S. Nuclear Industry Council, although I am a partner emeritus in the Nuclear Energy Practice Group of Pillsbury Law Firm. I anticipate that my comments on behalf of USNIC represent the views of many of our members but may not necessarily reflect the unanimous view of our association.

Almost 3 years ago, I testified before this subcommittee on a variety of nuclear legislation pending at that time. In that testimony, I stated that, while I was a big supporter of the NRC -- I was a Commissioner there for 9 years after all -- and its mission, I believe the agency had lost its way and was not meeting the mission as outlined in the Atomic Energy Act.

In my view at that time, the agency had become overly conservative and did not consistently apply commonsense principles in regulating the technologies it was overseeing. Further, I felt that the agency and its senior managers, as well as the Commission that led it were not sufficiently risk-informed, effective, timely, and did not possess the technical confidence needed to serve its vital mission.

Mr. Chairman, rather than provide a fulsome repeat of those remarks, I ask that they be included in the record of today's proceeding.

With that said, my views about the NRC are quite different today. While I believe that there is additional work to be done for the NRC to again deserve its recognition as the, quote, "gold standard of nuclear regulators," unquote, it has come a long way from where it stood 3 years ago.

This committee and Congress deserve credit and thanks for engendering this change. The passage of the ADVANCE Act of 2024, which required the agency to change its mission to enable the safe deployment of advanced nuclear technologies has resulted in a positive sea change in the way the agency behaves and regulates.

As a partner in the world's oldest and largest nuclear law practice, I can attest firsthand that the management and staff of the agency have demonstrated a new determination to be more efficient, risk-informed, and results oriented in the pursuit of its traditional safety mission.

Executive orders that President Trump issued about a year ago have also resulted in some beneficial outcomes, particularly Executive Order 14300 that tasked the agency with reviewing and reinventing its regulatory framework. Had this committee asked me to testify a year ago, I would have expressed reservations about the scope and pace of the reforms that were envisioned by the orders.

While not all of the NRC's proposed and final rules in response to the EOs have been published, I can say with confidence the members of USNIC have been impressed by the degree to which these regulatory changes should enable the prompt and safe deployment of promising advanced nuclear technologies without sacrifice to safety principles.

Three years ago, I was very critical of the agency's efforts to create a new regulatory framework for advanced reactors under part 53 as prescribed under the Nuclear Energy Innovation and Modernization Act. This effort, which had dragged on for 7 years, had resulted in a proposed rule that would have been neither used nor useful to the advanced nuclear community.

In stark contrast, the final part 53 rule the Commission issued, which became effective in April of this year, addressed virtually all of the concerns raised by the members of USNIC and the nuclear

industry, and I believe it can be a useful framework for future advanced reactor technologies.

In my prior testimony, I was also critical of the technical prowess and efficiency of the Commission. My view today is quite different. I believe the current five members of the Commission are working in a more cohesive, collegial, and technically informed manner than has been the case for almost 20 years, and I believe their spirit of collaboration to achieve a prompt revision of the agency's regulations is vastly different than it was even a few short years ago.

I also want to recognize both former Chairman David Wright and current Chairman Ho Nieh for their effective leadership through a time of immense change and adaptation at the agency. I firmly believe the Commission works best when the Chairman and the Commissioners park their party affiliations at the door and render their safety decisions in an efficient and risk-informed manner, and I do believe that is happening today at the NRC.

I do have one note of caution. There are some in Washington who would urge that the NRC should evolve toward being a more chairman-focused agency, similar to the way in which the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission operates. I believe this would be an ill-advised mistake.

Over the decades since its founding in 1975, the NRC has been a pillar of stability during a time when other Federal agencies have swung quite widely from left to right and vice versa. For the nuclear industry to thrive and grow, it needs a Commission structure that is collegial, efficient, risk-informed, and predictable, standards that absent further tinkering it is well-positioned to achieve.

In preparation for my testimony, I have reviewed all six pieces of legislation that are being considered today and support their general intent. In my prior remarks, I made a few suggestions --

Mr. Latta. I am sorry. If you can just wrap up real quick. Thank you.

Mr. Merrifield. I look forward to working with you on this effort.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Merrifield follows:]

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543 ******** COMMITTEE INSERT ********

Mr. Latta. I appreciate that. Thanks so much, and thank you to all of our witnesses.

We will now move into the question-and-answer portion of our hearing. I will begin the questioning and recognize myself for 5 minutes.

Ms. Korsnick, last Congress we enacted legislation that aimed to decouple U.S. reliance on Russian-enriched uranium for commercial fuel industry and increase domestic fuel production capacity. Is the market responding to congressional action to bolster the domestic fuel industry?

Ms. Korsnick. Thank you. Yes, I would say we are seeing progress. You used the word "market," and I would say there hasn't been much added to the market just yet, but we are seeing construction. I would note that not only are we seeing government investment, but we are seeing also private sector investment. So it is good signs.

Mr. Latta. Well, thank you.

Would more streamlined licensing assist the build-out of our domestic nuclear fuel industry?

Ms. Korsnick. Absolutely. In fact, one of the bills that is under consideration talks about having the ability to have some at-risk construction for enrichment facilities. That is an example of something that I think would be helpful as we are trying quickly to bring things on. As you know, we are off of Russian supply by January 1, 2028.

Mr. Latta. Well, one last question for you. You know, several of us on the committee have been looking at the recycling question of the spent nuclear rod. So the back end of the fuel cycle, how would the Nuclear REFUEL Act benefit that expanded diverse nuclear fuel supply into the future?

Ms. Korsnick. So the REFUEL Act I think does a very important thing, and it looks at reprocessing facilities and doesn't call them production facilities but, instead, has them licensed under part 70, a different part than what currently would be used to license. That new part is more appropriate and a more appropriate framework for recycling facilities because it is targeted at fuel facilities, which is the right framework for recycling because recycling produces fuel for other

reactors.

And so I think it is a nice step forward to help appropriately license recycling.

Mr. Latta. Well, thank you.

Mr. Merrifield, when you testified before the committee 3 years ago, you recommended focusing the Advisory Committee on Reactor Safeguards on new, novel, and safety-significant licensing matters. Does the ACRS review matters today that are the best use of time and resources?

Mr. Merrifield. Mr. Chairman, thank you very much.

Yes, my testimony 3 years ago was a result of a study I had done with the Nuclear Innovation Alliance, really looking into the details of ACRS and how it operates. We believed and continue to believe that focusing the ACRS on those more novel issues, newer reactors, not relooking at a lot of things would be a more efficient way of proceeding and would certainly enable a more prompt resolution of licensing for advanced reactors.

Mr. Latta. Well, thank you.

Mr. Harrell, how would you describe the NRC's public engagement process today? And does it make the mandatory hearing an unnecessary burden?

Mr. Harrell. Thank you, Congressman, and thanks for your leadership on these issues. There are an immense amount of opportunities for public engagement, and let me underscore that that is critical to us getting from the President's goal of deploying 400 gigawatts of nuclear by 2050.

The public has to be bought in, but public meetings happen during the pre-application period. Notifications happen when the application is received. There are public meetings during the review, including the environmental review. There is notices of hearing opportunities, and documentation is posted on the NRC's website to really try to foster and engage more public input in the entire process.

In the end, getting rid of the uncontested mandatory hearing does not eliminate any opportunity of public engagement. In the end, there is a lot of that throughout the beginning of the

process. So, in our mind, this is a commonsense reform that comes into place, and if there is a contested licensing proceeding, then absolutely we should have that back end process, but this gets rid of an unnecessary step in the process.

Mr. Latta. Well, just following along with that, by removing the mandatory hearing, how much time -- I know this is kind of a conjecture. How much time, money, and overall resources does the NRC and the licensees save and apply to other licensing activity?

Mr. Harrell. In at least one advanced reactor developer, the experience was over half a million dollars in fees just for this singular hearing and a delay that was at least 6 months. On average, we are seeing somewhere between that 4 to 7 months and upwards of a million dollars, not to mention a lot of significant staff time to prep for that where we need to be allocating staff to be focused on more novel and complicated environmental issues or regulatory-related issues.

Mr. Latta. Well, thank you very much.

I know the clock got started a little bit late when I started. So I am going to yield back the balance of my time and recognize the ranking member, the gentlelady from Florida, for her 5 minutes of questions.

Ms. Castor. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thanks again to our witnesses for being here today.

Dr. Huff, when you served at the Office of Nuclear Energy, you were responsible for the Department of Energy's promotion of nuclear energy. Your testimony today says that a lot of that deployment has to be -- when you were looking ahead, you were looking at technological innovation and public confidence. So what did you do in your role to ensure that projects your office supported centered on that confidence and transparency and safety?

Ms. Huff. Thank you, Ranking Member. I really enjoyed this part of the job. It involved a lot of public engagement via videos and social media posts about all of our accomplishments, decisions that were being made, new programs that were being considered, testimony like this with Congress.

And, in fact, one of the very first instances of testimony that I gave before Congress I committed to ensuring that all competed grants within my office or all discretionary grants within my office would be competed openly rather than through sole-source grants, and we stood by that. And I think that is critical also because I believe that taxpayers and Congress and industry and the public all sort of need to have confidence that those projects are moving along, that they are getting updates, and that they will be competed.

Ms. Castor. So, under the current administration, they have really taken a step back from that transparency. What concerns you the most?

Ms. Huff. Yes, I think the thing that concerns me the most is that external public commenters are asked to comment on orders that are not fully brought together. We have a situation where, you know, DOE NE orders were released in draft form to the industry but not to the public, and this caused real media concern that led to folks being asked outside of DOE "what's going on inside DOE?"

And the answers have to become speculative at that point, which causes confusion, misinformation, and that misinformation is the enemy of nuclear energy.

Ms. Castor. And how about the professional staff reductions and firing?

Ms. Huff. I am sorry?

Ms. Castor. How about the professional staff reductions and firings at the NRC?

Ms. Huff. Even at the staffing levels that we saw when I was in the Office of Nuclear Energy, there was a great need for more program direction funding to boost up the staff that we had to continue doing the incredible amount of growing effort that we were committing.

Ms. Castor. So, Ms. Korsnick, last year, the President issued an executive order to reduce the expert personnel and functions of the Advisory Committee on Reactor Safeguards to the minimum necessary. Now, that committee is one of the most important sources of independent expertise in reactor safety, safety review. They have been part of the safety review of virtually

every generation of commercial reactor technology.

The Nuclear Advisory Committee Reform Act that we are considering today would constrain that ACRS. It would forbid the committee from taking any action, including review of a license application, without the NRC's explicit request. It just seems like at a time when we are pressing forward on technology and innovation, we need public confidence in the NRC, which has already been shaken.

So do you think it is helpful to have less technological review by outside experts on this committee as we move forward?

Ms. Korsnick. Thank you for your question.

I think the goal of the legislation is around efficiency. I agree with you that it is important that we have confidence in the NRC. I do feel that bringing efficiency to the ACRS process is helpful and can be done with safety in mind. So I believe the terms of "they can look at new and novel issues at the direction by the Commission," I do think that that can be done well with a high bar for safety.

Ms. Castor. I think that it is kind of a call across the industry for their input on this because we do want to move quickly on technological innovation, but if you undermine public confidence and you don't have the independent expertise and oversight, I think that will be problematic in future years.

Dr. Huff, one of the reactors supported by DOE's Advanced Reactor Demonstration Program is built by a company called TerraPower. They just started construction in April. It is being built on the site of a retired coal plant in Wyoming. Why are old coal plants the ideal location for advanced nuclear projects?

Ms. Huff. Thank you, Congresswoman.

I think it starts with the workers. A lot of the same skills used in the secondary side of a thermal coal plant are also used on the secondary side of a nuclear power plant: boilermakers,

669 turbine generators, maintenance operators, welders, electricians, et cetera. Those workers and the
670 communities around them deserve to have an opportunity to take part in this new technology, to be
671 paid as well as many of those workers are paid in nuclear, which is extremely well compared to coal
672 in many cases.
673 Ultimately, too, former coal sites also have something that --
674 Mr. Latta. I am sorry to interrupt. The gentlelady's time has expired and yields back.
675 The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Texas, the vice chairman of the subcommittee,
676 for 5 minutes for questions.
677 Mr. Weber. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.
678 Mr. Harrell, I am going to come to you first. Thank you for your testimony.
679 To my knowledge, an overwhelming majority of our country's nuclear plants were built prior
680 to 1990. Just for the record, I was also born prior to 1990. For some time, these plants were
681 threatened with licensing renewal uncertainty to continue operating. We are all painfully aware.
682 Your testimony highlights some recent regulatory clarity providing long-term policy
683 commitments regarding plant licensing. However, with the growing energy demand of the future,
684 how would the Nuclear Advisory Committee Reform Act allow the Nuclear Regulatory Commission,
685 NRC, to enhance plant licensing practices, therefore, meeting our growing energy? Your thoughts.
686 Mr. Harrell. Thank you, Congressman, and thank you for your leadership both of this
687 committee and of the Science Committee. It really has been an important piece of catalyzing this
688 nuclear innovation and bipartisan policy that has come across the finish line.
689 The crux of this issue is we need a nimble, predictable, and efficient regulatory that enables
690 innovation and deployment without sacrificing safety, and I think this bill navigates that careful line.
691 We need to eliminate some of the duplicative steps in this process and ensure that
692 independent experts who are in place ultimately are dealing with the novel and unique issues that
693 are coming before the Commission, not that it is a requirement on every step.

So I think making it discretionary at the request of the Commission, narrowing these experts' focus on some of these novel areas, and ensuring that there is turnover added, and ensuring there is new talent. I mean, there is an immense amount of innovation that has happened over the last decade. Two terms on these I think is an appropriate realm. Let's ensure that we are getting new talent and who know the new status of technology are more comfortable with what is moving forward because this industry is evolving rapidly.

Mr. Weber. I appreciate that.

Dr. Huff, I am going to give you kudos for being over at the American Nuclear Society meetings that we have over at the Capitol Hill Club. For my colleagues that don't know, we hold those. Michelle Harstine does a good job of holding those about once a month when we have the time.

Ms. Korsnick, I am going to come to you. You state that the primary challenge facing large-scale deployment is not technology development, rather, issues such as cost, schedule risk, supply chains, and workforce challenges. Would today's legislation provide some regulatory predictability, if there is such a thing, that at least mitigates permitting schedule risk?

Ms. Korsnick. Thank you.

Absolutely. I think the bills that we have in front of us are a good step forward to help bring that regulatory predictability. And, again, I want to share: A strong industry needs a strong regulator. So we are very supportive of having a strong and very capable regulator, and I think the bills before us do a good job at managing that and yet bringing efficiency into the equation.

Mr. Weber. So, suffice to say, we would like to see a day when the goal of reform is to make sure licensing of worthy projects is not the main holdup. Would you agree?

Ms. Korsnick. That is a beautiful vision.

Mr. Weber. Okay. I love it when a plan comes together.

Mr. Merrifield, how about you? Would you agree with that?

Mr. Merrifield. I do, and I want to go back to the ACRS for a moment. That institution was created at a time of the very earliest days of the industry, and there was a need for a review of each and every design. That is not the case today. I think ACRS is an important institution. I think it should remain. I think it should be available for the Commission to have that second opinion.

But, frankly, if you look at every other industry in the country, oil and gas, other forms of generation, all of them have digitalized controls. The reactors that the NRC regulates are only getting around to doing some of that, and ACRS and some of the members who were involved in that review are part of the reason why that is the case.

I think sometimes ACRS can hinder the ability of technologies to move forward, and I think the Commission needs more ability to have a hand over reviewing it.

Mr. Weber. That makes sense.

Mr. Harrell, do you agree?

Mr. Harrell. I absolutely agree. We need an efficient, nimble, diligent regulator to move forward and enable this innovation and deployment.

Mr. Weber. Okay.

Mr. Merrifield, I am coming back to you. Your testimony highlights the need to address the technical expertise. Do you believe the NRC Staff Pay Alignment Act will meaningfully improve the NRC's ability to retain top technical talent, kind of like Dr. Huff here?

Mr. Merrifield. Yes.

Mr. Weber. Boy, that is easy.

What can I do with 16 seconds left, Mr. Chairman?

Mr. Merrifield. I am eagerly supporting that piece of legislation.

Mr. Weber. Have you heard the joke about -- well, I won't go there.

So, listen, great debate, but I will yield back.

Mr. Latta. The gentleman yields back the balance of his time.

744 The chair now recognizes the gentleman from New Jersey, the ranking member of the full
745 committee, for 5 minutes for questions.
746 Mr. Pallone. Thank you, Chairman Latta.
747 Since President Trump took office, Democrats have been sounding the alarm at his proposals
748 to dismantle our nuclear safety regulator.
749 Over 50 years ago, Congress decided that the people in charge of promoting the nuclear
750 industry and the folks in charge of making sure that that industry was safe should be two different
751 groups of people, and I never thought we would have to fight to keep it that way, but here we are.
752 Dr. Huff, at the end of your testimony, you mentioned how deliberately separating out the
753 parts of government responsible for promoting nuclear energy from the parts responsible for
754 regulating it has increased public confidence in nuclear energy, but can you talk more about that and
755 how moves to undo that separation could endanger the public perception of nuclear energy?
756 Ms. Huff. Thank you very much, Ranking Member.
757 In 1974 and 1975, when Congress separated the Department of Energy from the Nuclear
758 Regulatory Commission to create it, they did so so that the Department of Energy could oversee
759 research, development, and innovation, and promotion of nuclear energy. The NRC became
760 responsible for separately regulating and overseeing the nuclear industry.
761 And it matters because history shows what safety oversight can be lost when an entity
762 regulating a technical environment like this can lose independence.
763 At Chernobyl, Soviet leadership had captured its regulator and prioritized national pride over
764 security. A known flaw in reactor control rounds went unchecked. Safety protocols went
765 unheeded, and the worse nuclear power accident in history resulted.
766 At Fukushima, regulation was entrusted to the same government bureaucracy responsible for
767 its promotion. Operators failed to deploy countermeasures demanded by known seismic risks
768 recently brought to that body and failed to plan appropriately for evacuation. They also failed to

avoid the worst -- the second worst nuclear power accident in history.

These I do not raise to frighten anyone about nuclear power. The intent is to concern this body with the importance of the independence of these two concerns. The public sees these items and recognizes this role, and it is important that we respect that independence.

Mr. Pallone. Well, I appreciate that. Thank you.

Another question for you. I am also concerned about efforts to alter the authorities of the Advisory Committee on Reactor Safeguards, or ACRS, which, as you know, is an independent technical body that advises the NRC. And one proposal in the Nuclear Advisory Committee Reform Act would prevent the ACRS from weighing in even if it felt its expertise was necessary.

So my question, Dr. Huff, at the time when political considerations are clearly playing more of a rule at the NRC, can you discuss the importance of having an independent body comprised of technical experts to evaluate emerging issues and new technologies? And how should we ensure that the ACRS can maintain its independence?

Ms. Huff. Thank you, Ranking Member.

There was a fantastic study in 2020 about the history of the background of the Commissioners in the NRC, and I said earlier that that background has gotten less technical over time. It has tended to prefer people with a policy backgrounds or a legal background over the last many decades. Whereas the average before 2020 was around 74 percent technical background, now that we are moving into this space, where the current Commission, which is actually quite robust in terms of technical background right now, is about 60 percent people with a technical background; the ACRS serves to provide a technical opinion to that commission body. And the Commission, if not imbued with technical backgrounds, may not know when it is critical to ask for that technical opinion.

And so I do think that there is an important merited argument to ask in terms of whether or not the ACRS should in circumstances when they deem it necessary be able to investigate those things and make recommendations on their own.

I recognize that these hearings can get extremely long and difficult, and I am very supportive of ways in which we can maybe limit the amount of staff time dedicated to them.

RPTR DEAN

EDTR ROSEN

[11:16 a.m.]

Mr. Pallone. I only have 45 seconds, but I did want to touch on Ranking Member's Castor bill because I believe transparency is critical to maintain public support for nuclear energy. So in 30 seconds, is transparency from regulators critical to upholding public confidence in nuclear energy?

Ms. Huff. Absolutely, sunshine is the best disinfectant. And opening up the process gives the public a great deal of confidence in the Department of Energy.

Mr. Pallone. And if -- I don't know, Ms. Korsnick, do you agree?

Ms. Korsnick. Absolutely. I would say there was one provision in that bill that they wanted to transparency within 24 hours I believe was in the bill. I think that is a little restrictive, but the intent of the bill I think is well-played.

Mr. Pallone. All right, thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Mr. Latta. Thank you. The gentleman yields back.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Kentucky, the chair of full committee, for 5 minutes for questions.

The Chair. Thank you. And thanks to our witnesses for being here and starting with Ms. Korsnick, according to today's testimony and recent hearings, the NRC is working toward efficient, predictable, and timely permitting, and it is truly shifting its culture to better enable the safe expansion of nuclear power.

So two questions: Can you elaborate on why streamline licensing and risk-informed reviews are key to ensuring safety? And can all of this be achieved while increasing the pace of licensing?

Ms. Korsnick. Well, thank you. Well, I think the NRC actually has demonstrated that it can

all be done and increase the pace because they have actually done that. We are seeing subsequent license renewals now in much-reduced time, many months more efficient than --

The Chair. But in the same time of us being efficient and ensuring the safety.

Ms. Korsnick. Absolutely.

The Chair. Together, I want to tie that.

Ms. Korsnick. No, The bar for safety hasn't changed. And obviously, it is being, you know -- resulted in much reduced timelines. I want to say what was almost just 1 year for a subsequent license renewal recently approval recently. And in the past, it has been double that. And so, the reality is, most important thing, especially for risk informing is that risk informing is telling you the thing you are working on, how important is it to safety? And so the risk informing actually is a way to focus your time and attention on the most important issues. And so in general, we are trying to move towards a risk-informing, regulatory approach and it is showing that we are paying attention to the right safety things.

The Chair. Okay, thank you.

So Mr. Merrifield, you were an NRC commissioner for almost a decade I understand. And then overall, would the bills today overall -- would the bills today ensure sufficient focus on safety and public participation in the process, especially for new technologies that would ensure safety and how would they ensure safety?

Mr. Merrifield. I believe they would. I mean, the two that have gotten the greatest discussion today are obviously the ACRS piece. Again, the ACRS is accountable to the Commission, the Commission is accountable to Congress. And I think the Commission itself needs to have greater ability to manage that. But it can be done in a way that there is not a real public confidence.

On the issue of -- the only legislation I think having a mandatory process is something that frankly I have been calling for the elimination of really since I was a commissioner. There are layers

and layers of additional opportunities for public input that were not available when that was put into legislation back in the 1950s. It really resulted from an attempt to try to put a reactor in Queens New York, without any public comment at all. That is not the case now.

The NRC is a very transparent agency. It is meeting safety missions, doing it more effectively thanks to the ADVANCE Act and I think those can go hand in hand.

The Chair. Okay, thank you.

Mr. Harrell, would you talk about how the reforms today, so we are ensuring safety. So would you -- so that is understood, because we just had my first two questions for that. So would you talk about how the reform today and those enacted last Congress enable innovation and employment?

Mr. Harrell. Yes. This is the test for our the country. Ultimately, we have had 10 years of policy momentum driven by this committee in a bipartisan way, by multiple administrations to modernize the Nuclear Regulatory Commission and prepare us to compete globally. The ADVANCE Act and NEIMA were the signature items of this committee. And we are starting to see these things come to fruition now.

These bills before the committee today and I will use this analogy on congressional baseball game week, are singles and doubles to keep that momentum going. There are some targeted areas where it absolutely makes sense to make some reforms that will improve the process. And that positions our country, ultimately, to lead here because we are in global race.

Energy security is national security. And so, us leading not only by building here, by investing in our fuel supply chain, and ultimately, offering U.S. products globally is essential to our long-term national security and energy security priorities.

The Chair. Okay. And so you sort of answered my next question, but just more in the context of national security, why are these important? I know we need to be the leader when we are competing against China. Would you elaborate a little further?

Mr. Harrell. Yeah, absolutely. I think particularly on the fuel side, these are some natural next steps that we have to do. I mean, Congress has made a very conscious decision ultimately to reduce reliance on Russian fuel products. We have put billions of dollars of tax-payer resources behind you, enrichment projects, why wouldn't we do some reasonable steps to ensure that we get project delivery on that timeframe. I mean, that 2028 timeframe is coming here fairly quickly. In the end, nothing in these bills prohibit us from -- or shortcut the process in which a facility ultimately has to get a license to then begin the fuel process. But let's absolutely get things started on an early basis because we are racing against the clock. China certainly isn't worried about unnecessary barriers and so we need to modernize our process.

The Chair. Thank you. I see my time has expired. And I yield back.

Mr. Weber. [Presiding.] Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The gentleman yields back.

The chair recognizes Mr. Peters of California for 5 minutes.

Mr. Peters. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Clean baseload nuclear energy is and will continue to be a critical part of our energy generation mix, especially as demand continues to rise. Our plans for more nuclear power plants across the country, which everyone is planning for is a good idea; it has virtually unanimous support here in Congress. Those we are considering today will go a long way to making those plans reality.

The one thing that is missing is a solution to the question of nuclear waste, specifically the long-term storage of spent nuclear fuel. And the first thing that my constituents think of when they hear nuclear energy is SONGS where they -- San Onofre nuclear generating station. This decommissioned nuclear power plant is just outside my district in San Diego right on the Pacific coastline. And right now, we are on schedule to fully decommission the plant by 2028. However, after the plan is demolished, the spent nuclear fuel will remain on site in dry storage, and a lot of people in San Diego and southern California remain nervous about it. The spent nuclear fuel at SONGS is within 100 feet of the Pacific Ocean. It sits near dense population centers and active

military base, and multiple fault lines.

The GAO has rated the flood hazard at this site as high and the wildfire potential is very high. My constituents know we need a long-term fix for spent nuclear fuel storage and decades of inaction have led us to where we are today.

My Nuclear REFUEL Act with Chairman Latta, which is being considered today, is a crucial part of that solution, making it easier to recycle and reuse spent fuel, keeps certain reactors in a way from communities that also helps us build reliable supply chain of fuel which is good for national security.

I was encouraged to see the Department of Energy's recent request for information gauging interest nationwide on what States would be willing to accept spent fuel for nuclear lifecycle innovation campuses. I will closely monitor the follow-through, but Congress has to do its part to ensure recycling and permitting form is part of the solution. That is not all, we have got to keep talking about how to safely store the waste away from populated areas, and certainly away from the ocean.

Ms. Korsnick, I appreciate the comments in your testimony about waste, specifically about how we should have a national strategy for fuel storage, transportation and recycling. Can you talk about how nuclear fuel recycling specifically can be part of that solution?

Ms. Korsnick. Yes, thank you. Some of the innovation that you have heard talked about in this testimony, there will be new types of reactors. The reactors we have today are light water or thermal reactors, and there are ones that are being constructed now that are fast reactors. And in the recycling that you are talking about, it is an opportunity to use some of that recycled fuel and actually directly feed some of these fast reactors. It is a bit of a win-win, you are able to then fuel those reactors without using today's uranium supply, and it is actually using some of the used fuel. And so it is a nice way to close the fuel cycle so to speak. You can also use recycled processes to feed thermal reactors that we have today. But it is a little bit of a maybe more direct process to feed fast reactors.

So as we are having all this innovation and we are making changes and we are bringing fast reactors into, you know, the reality, I think it is an opportunity for us to evaluate closing the fuel cycle through recycling.

Mr. Peters. I appreciate your organization paying attention to that as we go forward.

Dr. Huff, what do you think Congress should do to ensure that we make progress, particularly across presidential administrations and congressional majorities on the long-term storage and nuclear waste?

Ms. Huff. Thank you, Congressman. I believe that continued attention on the communities that might host such facilities is pivotal. The consent-based siting program now called the collaborative based siting program, this administration is critical to that, and includes dividing resources and engagement to the physical locations and the people around them so that they can be prepared to assess whether and if and when they want to host such facilities.

Mr. Peters. Yeah, we have embarked on what some people consent-based process. I am going to support that because that is what everyone's agreed on. I am skeptical that a consent-based process is going to find consent at the same place where geological conditions are right, but I hope that it works. And it if doesn't work, I think we are going to have to make the hard choices here we tried to avoid in Congress. Because this kind of material just can't sit next to the ocean, next to a military base, next to population centers. And I know that my area is not the only place facing these kind of challenges. So thank you all for being here.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. Weber. The gentleman yields back.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Alabama for 5 minutes.

Mr. Palmer. I thank the chairman.

Mr. Harrell, getting the NRC to a place where they can effectively and safely move nuclear technology and innovation into the commercial sector is imperative. Nuclear generation is both a

dependable and reliable option for meeting the power demands that we are going to have for building the critical infrastructure for processing and refining critical minerals and rare earth elements and so that we compete in the arms race for artificial intelligence in quantum computing.

In your testimony, you mentioned Anteres achieving a reactor criticality and the first private company to do that. How does this impact -- how do you think it impacts the timeline for deploying SMRs?

Mr. Harrell. Thank you, Congressman, for your leadership and for the question. I think it is one single piece of a broader pathway of how we demonstrate new technologies moving forward. How we showed in this country that we can build nuclear again, that we can build a efficiently. And then the data that we get from any of these tests are instrumental in our licensing processes in how we deal with construction of facilities, the orient [check]. So that kind of learning by doing is essential in kind of building our muscle memory, which we are going to have to get much more efficient on to meet some of the goals, and ultimately, meet the rising demand that you have flagged as a national economic imperative.

Mr. Palmer. Ms. Korsnick, in reading your testimony last night, you hit on some key points. The challenge of large scale deployment, because most of these companies don't want to be the first and particularly problematic in terms of private investment. If we -- if we are going to invest in SMRs, we are going to need to build more than one at a time. We need a commitment to this. What I have really been pushing in committee is locating SMRs on an abandoned coal fired power plant sites, take advantage of the existing transmission lines and site these critical infrastructure that I mentioned earlier. How do you think that could help us in terms of eliminating that first-of-kind cost that you have mentioned in your testimony?

Ms. Korsnick. Yeah, thank you for the question. Broadly, I think siting nuclear plants on existing coal facilities is a great idea. Dr. Huff mentioned earlier, and I know we had an analysis done on supply chain of the people, how much could supply a nuclear plant versus the workers that

were at a coal plant. And it was 75 percent of the workers at a coal plant would be easily, I would say, moved to a nuclear plant.

Having worked in a nuclear plant before I would tell you it is probably higher than that, because as Dr. Huff mentioned, there are a lot a similarity. And so first of all, I think placing it there you have a ready workforce. And quite frankly, we have seen the effects of shutting down some of these plants in local communities, it is quite devastating. And so, you have the workforce that is ready and you have a community that will thrive as a result of the nuclear plant being there.

In addition to your point, you have access to transmission because that same plant was also in need of transmission. And so it is a ready-made success story I would say.

Mr. Palmer. It is expandable because you don't have to locate the number of SMRs there to meet the design capacity transmission line, you can add that later.

Ms. Korsnick. That is right.

Mr. Palmer. As you increase the power demand.

One of the other things that I am really focused on is recycling spent fuel. France is doing that. I think their government subsidizes it. You have mentioned some of the technical difficulties. One of the things that I want to focus on is the fact that since 1980 we have collected about $44 billion from energy customers. We are spending about $1.5 million a day for storage. Doesn't it make -- wouldn't it make more sense to invest those funds in recycling and developing that technology and building advance reactors. I rarely compliment France, but --

Ms. Korsnick. I think the knowledge that we have honestly to kind of put a big picture around this recycling makes a lot of sense. Technically, I think we have to understand it is cost profile. And that is the work that we need to do right now is to invest, to learn, to figure out if it is cost effective to do.

And at the same token we have to currently share and store the waste that we have safely which it is being done safely today. And so to your point, I think investment in our recycling makes

a lot of sense. And in the meantime, we have to make sure that the fuel we have is well taken care of.

Mr. Palmer. Mr. Chairman, our time has expired. But I really wish this was one of those times when we had more time to discuss this with this distinguished panel, I yield back.

Mr. Weber. The gentleman yields back. Why don't you get her cell phone? I am just messing with you.

The gentleman now recognizes the chair from New Jersey, Mr. Menendez, for 5 minutes.

Mr. Menendez. Thank you, Chairman. Today's hearing is especially important as we see increased mutilization of nuclear power to meet growing energy demands. New Jersey is considering nuclear as piece of the puzzle when it comes to reducing our constituents' energy bills and recently passed a new law that lifts longstanding barriers to increase nuclear power in the State. And no matter where you stand on nuclear, we must be committed that safety remains the core pillar of this discussion. So just yes or no for all the witnesses: Is an adequately staffed Nuclear Regulatory Commission essential to ensuring safety when it comes to nuclear? Just yes or no.

Ms. Korsnick. Yes.

Mr. Harrell. Yes.

Ms. Huff. Yes.

Mr. Merrifield. Yes.

Mr. Menendez. And Dr. Huff, can you briefly touch on a role NRC staff play when it comes to ensuring safety in nuclear reactors?

Ms. Huff. Yeah, absolutely. The NRC staff review the applications, engage the companies even before they submit their applications, the NRC staff are often tasked with being prepared to receive those applications and then engaging pre-application materials. All of that results in a lot of analysis and reports by those staff that go up to the Commission for a decision.

Mr. Menendez. I appreciate -- and the staff you were just discussing in terms of the roles

that they play. They are largely professional staff, so they are public servants with subject matter expertise, they are not beholden to any political party or industry interest when it comes to carrying out their job duties. Is that accurate?

Ms. Huff. Yes.

Mr. Menendez. However, since President Trump took office, over 400 professional staffers at NRC have left the agency. Teams that handle safety of experience the most significant staff reductions. So I want to go over how we got here. Shortly after President Trump took office, Trump and Elon Musk stood up the so-called Department of Government Efficiency, or DOGE, to gut our Federal agencies. The NRC expert staff left the agency by choice or were forced out. And the agency has been struggling to rehire staff ever since. A ProPublica article details DOGE's involvement at NRC and cites several instances where career staff at NRC were concerned about changes being made at the regulator. Here are a couple of examples: Steve Cohen who was leading the DOGE charge at NRC said the goal was to make the agency into a, quote, "rubber stamp" for the Trump administration and dismissed safety concerns raised by NRC staff.

Several new officials at the agency have little to no experience with nuclear energy policy or law. NRC career lawyers who are working on key cases have left. Trump signed a series of executive orders that directed NRC to reduce staff, speed up approval and rewrite safety rules.

In April, Democratic commissioners testified before this committee that they were concerned about being fired for not approving a nuclear reactor the Trump administration wants. We have already seen President Trump do this when he fired commissioner Hanson years before his term ended.

So again, just yes or no, do these actions help the NRC recruit and retain the professional staff needed to enable the agency to achieve its mission and ensure safety remains a top priority, just yes or no?

Ms. Korsnick. No.

Mr. Harrell. I would add that you all have leaned in on policy to give more authority and track the right talent into the agency, and absolutely we need to be adding new talent. And --

Mr. Menendez. These things are helpful, right?

Mr. Harrell. We need competent staff moving forward to ultimately process these actions, absolutely.

Ms. Huff. These actions are not helpful.

Mr. Merrifield. I think they complicated the commission's role. I think some of that number of people who left were because of the extraordinary opportunities in private industry, hence the reason for --

Mr. Menendez. 400 is a lot, right. So I think, yes, people are going to leave agencies at any given time. 400 is a mass exodus and I think these things are not helpful when you are trying to have the professional staff that is needed. So I am going it move on because I want to talk about independence.

Dr. Huff, when you hear the statement I mentioned earlier that they want to make the NRC a rubber stamp for the Trump administration, what does that mean to you?

Ms. Huff. Yeah, that means to me that the technical analysis does not matter, that it is more about the sort of decision about which businesses succeed and which do not. This is unacceptable. And I actually would applaud the Commission for especially some of their testimony pushing back on that attitude.

Mr. Menendez. Exactly right. And when we hear that Democratic commissioners at NRC are worried about getting fired for not approving a reactor that President Trump wants, does that sound like independence to you?

Ms. Huff. No, it does not.

Mr. Menendez. Yeah, and so this is what is so terribly concerning. And with my last 30 seconds I would like to go back to you, Dr. Huff, but I am going to have to keep going. This is

what is problematic, because we want to have a conversation about nuclear energy and the role it is going to play to meet our increasing energy demands, but we can't have a siloed conversation without acknowledging what the Trump administration is doing. And frankly undermining public confidence in the NRC, which is what is so problematic. We need to have both sides of the conversation so the American people know that we are taking these issues seriously and we want to ultimately deliver on our promise of safety.

And with that I yield back my 1 second.

Mr. Weber. The gentleman yields back.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Georgia for 5 minutes.

Mr. Allen. Thank you, Chairman. And thank Chairman Latta for holding this important hearing to discuss nuclear energy legislation. Obviously, we have established that nuclear energy is critical for our energy security here in the United States. As it is affordable, reliable and clean with lots of base -- well, 100 percent baseload capacity.

My district is home to Plant Vogtle where units 3 and 4 were the first nuclear reactors built in the United States in over three decades. And with unit 3 and 4 added, Plant Vogtle is the largest nuclear power station the country. And I am proud of everything the owners, and the co-owners went through and persevered through this project, and finally showed that America can actually do big things anymore. And we are going to talk more about this, dive more into this permitting.

And I am going to ask Ms. Korsnick and Mr. Merrifield and Mr. Harrell about my bill, the Nuclear Licensing Efficiency Act which is part of the ADVANCE Act that was signed into law last Congress. Provisions in this bill amended the Atomic Energy Act to require NRC to provide efficient, timely and predictable reviews for licensing and periodic review and revised licensing metrics and schedules to provide the most efficient performance possible. My question is, can you share from your perspective how you are implementing these permitting reforms and how they are working in the practice at the agencies. Ms. Korsnick, could you comment on that and Mr. Harrell?

Ms. Korsnick. Absolutely, yeah, thank you. As I mentioned earlier, we have seen direct results from the words that you just mentioned, to a more efficient regulator. And it is a combination of new things coming in, so think of construction permits, or licensing permits, you know, they have Kairos Power showed improvement, I think X-energy showed improvement, I think X-energy was 9 months ahead of schedule, still with the same high bar of safety.

So we are not talking about cutting corners. We are simply talking about going through things and doing them in a more efficient manner, listing it on subsequent license renewals for the current fleet. Listing it on licensing for the advance reactor. So I would say across the board, real culture change at the regulator has occurred to be able to prioritize the important risk significant conversations and get things approved in a timely manner.

Mr. Allen. Mr. Harrell?

Mr. Harrell. I would agree with Ms. Korsnick. I think worsening the tangible benefits of nearly a decade of your all strong work here driving forward modernization at the NRC and multiple administrations leaning into that issue. And it is going to be really critical so that we can capitalize on the Vogtle moment. In the end, Vogtle is a massive success story, even with the cost overruns. I think the Georgia ratepayer is going to be very thankful for that long-term investment. And we have got to find ways to build more of those reactors and leverage the lessons learned from Georgia and find ways to build new advanced reactors as well. And so, these nimble processes are really critical to scaling and meeting our goals to meet rising demand, grow American manufacturing, and ultimately, reduce emissions.

Mr. Allen. Mr. Merrifield.

Mr. Merrifield. Let me give you two examples, real world examples. One, frequently the NRC staff would have a particular piece of information they want to get an answer, an applicant would provide that information, and the NRC would say, Well, that is not what we wanted, go back and give something else. It was very much bring me a rock. That attitude has significantly

changed; the agency is actually more forthcoming about what it expects in the information you provided that I think is being constructed. That is a direct consequence of the ADVANCE Act.

The other one is the agency would frequently, in the past, have wave after wave of requests for additional information from a licensee. That took up extraordinary periods of time, where the ping-pong match between the agency and the applicant took place. Now the agency has adopted more of an audit process where they will actually sit down with the applicant, walk through those questions, address them on the spot, where more research needs to be done or more information needs to be provided by the applicant, they can do that, saves an extraordinary amount of time.

Mr. Allen. So it is important what Congress does to assist you in doing this in an efficient manner.

Mr. Merrifield. Congress and this committee have done an extraordinary job over the last 10 years of providing waves of legislation that have allowed this industry to thrive, and for the NRC being a more efficient regulator, yet at the same time, meeting a safety mission cap.

Mr. Allen. And what we need to know is what we need to do to go forward to make this industry reliable for the future.

With that, I am out of time. And I yield back. Thank you very much.

Mr. Weber. The gentleman yields back.

The gentlelady from Virginia is now recognized for at least 5 minutes.

Ms. McClellan. Thank you, Mr. Chair and Ranking Member Castor, for holding this very important hearing today.

A safe and well-regulated nuclear energy sector is key to a true all-of-the-above energy strategy, that lessens our crippling reliance on fossil fuels and supports true American energy independence. I appreciate the relatively bipartisan nature of the bills that are before us today, but I do have concerns with some of them and believe that we have a meaningful opportunity to work in a bipartisan manner to bring more nuclear energy safely online and meet our growing energy demand.

That being said, I continue to have concerns over the Trump administration's actions that are targeting the NRC and its independence. These actions inject an unnecessary level of uncertainty that could jeopardize projects that are currently in the works, and also, put safety at risk as we have heard. And just to point out a couple of very serious concerns, we have had DOGE-affiliated staff with no experience in nuclear safety who have forced out career safety experts throughout the government and tried to legally make the NRC into a rubber stamp. And we have two current commissioners that have warned that they fear they could be fired at any moment if they refused to approve a nuclear reactor due to safety concerns.

As someone with a nuclear power plant in my district, safety is top of mind, and we need to be sure that we are maintaining the safety of these projects. Work is also underway in my district to establish one of the first commercial scale nuclear fusion power plants in the country. And this was made possible by the ADVANCE Act which contained provisions related to regulated fusion and ensuring that this cutting edge technology has a place in the future of American technology.

Ms. Korsnick, do you believe that the NRC is adequately balancing the need for regulation with facilitating the growth of this novel technology, which has a lot of potential to revolutionize energy production. Where do you think the NRC can improve its oversight and provide greater certainty for projects that are currently in progress?

Ms. Korsnick. Is your question specifically fusion? Or broader?

Ms. McClellan. I am interested in fusion. If we have time, broader. But I also have one more question I want to ask.

Ms. Korsnick. Okay, well, if I am just going to say broadly for the NRC, I would say the NRC has demonstrated amazing resilience and has highly dedicated staff. And I have high confidence that the NRC is able to assess the safety of the designs that are coming at them, whether these are advance reactors or whether they are the light water technology of today. So I remain highly confident in a strong regulator that we have at the NRC.

Ms. McClellan. Turning to the REFUEL Act, I am generally interested in changes that ease the licensing burden on technologies that could help reduce the amount of spent fuel we have to deal with. But I do think that efforts to export those technologies overseas -- to overseas nations should still be subject to licensing.

So Dr. Huff, can you speak to the importance of ensuring that bad actors do not get a hold of reprocessing technology, especially from a nonproliferation standpoint.

Ms. Huff. Thank you, Congresswoman. It is pivotal that nations and bad actor terrorist groups do not get access to the capability to build enrichment facilities or reprocessing facilities that would supply material for a ton of equipment. We have a great deal of expertise and capabilities procuring such facilities here in the United States, and we have a robust expert control policy that if maintained, prevents this.

International cooperation and engagement also relies on our technical leadership here in the United States. So we have a strong voice at those tables around nuclear energy, nuclear nonproliferation policy, especially at the IAEA when we are leading in the nuclear power industry. And so it goes hand in hand, those regulations and the expert control space will strive to protect while we also strive to promote.

Ms. McClellan. And in the remaining time, Dr. Huff, I want to explore a little more about the

impact the administration's actions are having on the entire NRC workforce pipeline, including grant opportunities for students, research fellowships and trade schools that are training the next generation of nuclear energy specialists. How do we stem the bleeding and restore staff expertise at the NRC to ensure we are protecting the talent pipeline going forward?

Ms. Huff. Thank you so much for bringing this up, Congresswoman. The bill before you takes a good shot at fixing this at the hiring stage. But before that in the pipeline, the university community has been concerned with a pause on the discretionary grants due to an executive order by this administration. The NRC has had to take, including discretionary grants to support scholarships and fellowships and faculty awards and community colleges and technical college awards to students from fiscal year 2024 dollars that were appropriated, those were never awarded. The community has been engaging with the NRC on that process, but it is still not resolved.

Ms. McClellan. Okay, thank you. I thank you for the extra 14 seconds. I yield back.

Mr. Weber. You are welcome. The gentleman yields back.

The gentleman recognizes the gentleman from Ohio for 5 minutes.

Mr. Balderson. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you all for being here today.

My first question is directed to Mr. Harrell. Mr. Harrell, thank you for being here. Many advanced reactor companies are looking at using HALEU for their reactors. One company Centrus operating in my home State of Ohio is taking important steps to bring commercial HALEU capacity online to fuel America advanced reactors.

Mr. Harrell, how does the legislation we are discussing today specifically the Nuclear REFUEL Act and the American Enrichment Deployment Act help fuel enrichment companies set up businesses in the United States? My follow-up to that, would be what is the risk if we do not stand up to strong domestic fuel supply chain?

Mr. Harrell. Thank you, Congressman, for the question. As an Ohioian myself, I have been to Piketon a couple of times and am excited about what is happening there. There was strong

alignment across government on investing in the nuclear fuel supply chain, in large part, because of this committee's leadership. We put significant investments behind ramping up enrichment capabilities, Centrus is one of the awardees that received resources there. We have the Russian import restriction in place that kind of sets a shot clock here and drives some urgency to investment. And in the end, we want to see the U.S. have energy security. And nuclear field security is energy security. Everything from taking the rocks out of the ground, to enrichment capability to fuel fabrication, we need to invest in as much as possible here.

I think this legislation makes a lot of sense, particularly if we are going to leverage those taxpayer dollars that upwards of almost $3 billion that you all gave DOE to drive forward here. We have got a tight timeline, 2028 is many coming here fast. If we can get construction started faster, but then still maintaining these enrichment facilities, before they would have nuclear materials have to get a license, I think it is a no-regrets move.

Mr. Balderson. All right, thank you. I will also address my next question to you. In addition to the investments and enrichment, I am excited about the future of advance nuclear and small modular reactors. Can you discuss what you are seeing from the nuclear industry in terms of actual investment and deployment in these technologies as we move out of this hypothetical stages and into construction?

Mr. Harrell. The light at the end of tunnel is very bright. New nuclear is happening now. We have multiple reactors under construction in this country. We are seeing investments on the first followers of those reactors as well. We are investing billions of dollars in the enrichment side, we are seeing companies drive more private sector investment. And then, I think, what is a real critical driver and shouldn't be overlooked is we are seeing energy consumers say that they demand this product. They want reliable, baseload clean energy nuclear power. And so you are seeing everyone from Amazon, Google Microsoft, to heavy energy consumers like mining companies, New Corps and others, Dow in Texas, saying we need this product, we need to build it now. Those

customers demanding the product is literally catalyzing this unique moment.

Mr. Balderson. All right, thank you. Ms. Korsnick and Mr. Merrifield, would you like to add anything to that, Ms. Korsnick first.

Ms. Korsnick. Yeah, I will just say unprecedented investment is flowing from the private sector as well. And I think that is a real example of how we are sort of in the new day for nuclear. And so, yeah, just reinforce the comments that he made.

Mr. Balderson. Thank you,

Mr. Merrifield. I would say it is, you know, when we contrast where we were back in the 2000s when we thought we were going to have nuclear renaissance, we had one set of reactors and one set of customers. And what we were confronted with today would have been something quite different, we have a really four sets of potential customers and reactors, large gigawatt-sized reactors which we will build, SMRs typically in the 300 megawatt size, light water reactors, we see a lot of those ordered. Advanced reactors, molten salt, high-temperature gas, sodium-cooled, which can not only provide electricity, but also can provide industrial heat, and that is why we are seeing the interest of the oil industry, we are seeing the interest of the mining industry and others. And then finding the micro reactors both for military and for civilian uses extraordinary panoply in technology coming forward. Not all of them are going to work, not all of them are going to be funded, but 10 years from now, we are going to see a lot of reactors with a lot of different stripes.

Mr. Balderson. Okay, thank you for that answer.

Ms. Korsnick, and I know we are going to run out of time here probably, but in your testimony you note that Congress should focus on strengthening the domestic nuclear fuel cycle and ensure timely development of mining, conversion, enrichment, and advanced fuel capabilities. Can you discuss how the American Enrichment Deployment Act will help streamline the licensing and construction process under the Atomic Energy Act to expand our enrichment capacity in a safe and secure manner? And I will let you turn that in because my time is out. So thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. Weber. The gentleman yields back.

The gentlelady from California is now recognized for at least 5 minutes.

Ms. Matsui. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for the witnesses for being here today. I would like to continue the line of questioning started by my colleague from California regarding nuclear waste. I also have a nuclear power plant that was actually shut down over 30 years ago, it is in Sacramento, California, but the spent fuel is still there because the U.S. Government has failed to implement an effective nuclear waste program. And I am really disappointed that having this hearing today without considering legislation that would advance an effective Federal nuclear waste program.

Now, many of my colleagues on this committee believe that recycling will solve the waste problem for us, but it remains to be seen whether recycling or spent nuclear fuel will scale the United States. And even if nuclear recycling does take off, it won't fully eliminate the waste problem.

Now, I support the continuing development of nuclear recycling, but this can't be another excuse to kick the can down the road on a Federal nuclear waste program.

Now, Dr. Huff, can you explain some of the economic and technological challenges to scaling nuclear recycling in the United States?

Ms. Huff. Thank you, Congresswoman, you are right, recycling does have real promise. It is not simple. I hope that it will become a part of a comprehensive waste management plan. In the United States we have over 90,000 metric tons of spent nuclear fuel, making 2,000 more metric tons every year. The current most mature recycling facility in the world at La Hague in France manages to run through a capacity of recycling of about 1,700 metric tons of spent nuclear fuel a year.

So if you are doing the math, that means that that facility if it were deployed at that scale here wouldn't quite make it through our annual amount. So we are going to have to think really big

with any recycling capacity and even those strategies result in spent nuclear fuel, which also must be managed so it is no replacement for spent nuclear fuel strategy but could really benefit.

Ms. Matsui. Okay. So we still need a comprehensive Federal waste program, even under this scenario, right. Is that correct?

Ms. Huff. Yes.

Ms. Matsui. Now earlier this year the Department of Energy announced plans to support so-called nuclear lifecycle innovation campuses, which are host recycling fuel fabrication and waste disposal activities. Dr. Huff, if these sides were doing recycling at scale, they have to store waste before processing, and they still have to deal with the leftover waste after recycling. At what point does that become an interim storage facility?

Ms. Huff. Thank you, Congresswoman. Your insight is correct. It would be immediately an interim storage facility. And in fact I think a good reasonable strategy that has merit would be to begin such a facility as an interim storage facility and build adjacent to it such recycling strategies. This would immediately reduce the liability on the order of $1 billion a year to the U.S. Federal Government which we pay in the nuclear waste --

Ms. Matsui. Right.

Ms. Huff. Yeah.

Ms. Matsui. Okay. So under what circumstances, and for what activities would the Nuclear Waste Policy Act need to be amended to construct any of these sites?

Ms. Huff. Yeah, at the moment, there is a linkage between the licensing of a repository and then interim storage facility being constructed. So there does need to be a look at the nuclear waste policy.

Ms. Matsui. Okay. The standard waste contract prioritizes all this fuel and fuel from shutdown reactors. If these recycling sites are being supported by the Federal Government, do you believe these sites should prioritize spent fuel from shutdown plants?

Ms. Huff. At the moment, I think they should certainly follow the law. I think it is the case that many recycling companies may prefer steed stock from more recently discharged fuel from the physics alone. Many of our more recent spent nuclear fuel discharges have higher initial enrichment and longer burn-up. Both of those tend to contribute to a higher total fizzle equivalent inventory which makes it a better fuel.

Ms. Matsui. Better so, even this is not really a good solution here at all in the sense for the spent nuclear fuel. So you might have to figure that part of it out. But if we can somehow prioritize some of the old spent nuclear fuel, it would be wonderful. So anyway, I think my time is moving on, so I yield back.

Mr. Weber. The gentlelady yields back.

The gentlelady from Tennessee is recognized for at least 5 minutes.

Mrs. Harshbarger. Oh, thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you to members for being here today. And thank you for your expertise in this area, this is very important.

You know, the legislation we are considering today will build upon the success of the ADVANCE Act and it is going to help meet our Nation's growing energy needs. For example, the American Enrichment Deployment Act discussion drafts meant to help restart our domestic uranium enrichment capabilities. And there are several companies, including BWXT, which is in my district, are already working to restore this critical national capability.

So Mr. Merrifield and Ms. Korsnick, how does enabling faster bills and licensing of enrichment facilities impact our energy security posture?

Mr. Merrifield. We have a critical need for additional enrichment, particularly as is relates to high-assay low-enriched uranium, which is what many of these reactors will require. And so, that legislation would streamline the licensing process in a way and allow construction to begin earlier, which would facilitate closing that gap.

Mrs. Harshbarger. Exactly.

Ms. Korsnick.

Ms. Korsnick. Yeah, I would agree with that. We are in the process through a lot of your good leadership in really focusing on enrichment on the front end of the fuel cycle. It just all takes time. And so, it is just nice if we have some this flexibility that is outlined in the American Enrichment Deployment Act to allow construction to a point before the licensing is received.

Mrs. Harshbarger. Yeah. You know, I would like to turn the discussion draft relating to the advisory committee on reactor safeguards. And Ms. Korsnick and Mr. Merrifield, you each have direct experience with this. Mr. Merrifield, you have seen both sides as a licensing process and as an attorney and as an NRC commissioner. Ms. Korsnick, you are not only at the helm of the NEI, you served as chief nuclear officer for the largest fleet of nuclear reactors in the Nation, which is pretty stealthy. So based on your experience, does NRC staff routinely evaluate highly technical safety and risk-significant issues as part of the agency's licensing and regulatory responsibilities?

Ms. Korsnick. Oh, absolutely. The NRC staff is technically very competent, very strong and absolutely goes through many technical issues.

A conversation that played out earlier on the ACRS, again, it is a needed body and I do think focusing it on new and novel issues can be accomplished, but still keeping their curiosity and engagement on new processes, I think it can be done well.

Mr. Merrifield. And I don't think anybody on this side of the table nor anyone in the legislation proposes that you get rid of the ACRS. I found the ACRS to be very valuable in many cases where the Commission was struggling with a technical issue. We wanted to get that second opinion. We asked the ACRS to weigh in, and they did provide a valuable role. So I am not, you know, criticizing the existence of the body. I do think having done a study where we interviewed, you know, over 35 people who were former commissioners, other senior staff, that there are efficiencies that could be put into that program to make them used and useful in a way that allowed the agency to maintain its safety mission, and not a road, that independence.

Mrs. Harshbarger. Yeah.

Mr. Merrifield. And I think the legislation as proposed would also achieve that goal.

Mrs. Harshbarger. Well, that is exactly what I am leading into, because you have got 4,500 cumulative hours of reviewing and licensing permits that NRC has done. And given that fact, do you think, just as you said, the ACRS should focus its advice on matters to the Commission that staff are not familiar with, like technologies and designs that are novel and risk-significant and haven't been examined before so I assume you say yes.

Mr. Merrifield. Yes.

Mr. Harrell. Congresswoman, could I add?

Mrs. Harshbarger. Sure.

Mr. Harrell. ACRS is a Federal advisory committee. It is a Federal advisory committee with additional teeth than the typical Federal advisory committee, because it brings technical experts. But we shouldn't misconstrue the ACRS with the staff who are doing the diligent review.

Mrs. Harshbarger. Totally.

Mr. Harrell. This advisory committee is about bringing talented individuals who have either academic or technical or industry experience in there that they can advise the Commission and ultimately contribute in these spaces, but it is, like, they are not a replacement for staff.

Mrs. Harshbarger. Totally.

Mr. Harshbarger. And so I think that is why I think we are all in agreement on keeping ACRS --

Mrs. Harshbarger. I agree, stay in your lane. I have to deal with that in healthcare. Are you kidding me? Advisory committees take their own legs and start doing their own things, so I gotcha.

Mr. Merrifield. Yes, that has occurred in the past.

Mrs. Harshbarger. Well, it does. I have other questions, but I will have to submit them for

the record, since I am almost out of time and I don't want to go over my time, Chairman.

Mr. Weber. The gentlelady yields back.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from New York 5 minutes.

Mr. Tonko. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you for being here, to the panel. And we shouldn't see the NRC as an obstacle to new nuclear development. It is a partner in building and preserving public trust and promoting safety, which are, I believe, very critical to allowing the industry to grow. And the NRC's work cannot happen efficiently or effectively without sufficient qualified staff.

Now, Ms. Korsnick, how important is it for nuclear project developers to be working with a regulator with experienced and technically knowledgeable staff.

Ms. Korsnick. Yeah, it is critical, right. These developers are investing time, energy and effort to bring some new technologies to the market. I think it is it was mentioned earlier.

A lot of conversation happens even before you officially enter the licensing process there is a lot of pre-application conversation that happens. It is absolutely critical that you have, you know, confident and knowledgeable staff at the NRC to engage with these developers.

Mr. Tonko. Well, I appreciate that, because I see this as a function of human infrastructure that is there to work to strengthen the outcome. And we need the NRC to be able to attract and retain staff, especially in limited and highly specialized fields that require technical knowledge.

Mr. Harrell, your testimony mentions several private sector companies that are developing new nuclear projects. I think it is safe to assume that these companies will be competing with NRC for some of the same workforce.

Now, I talked to all these younger students in college, and you don't hear that many going into nuclear engineering or the nuclear energy field. Are you seeing a growing competition for this specialized and limited workforce?

Mr. Harrell. We are. I think we are seeing States and academic institutions invest more in

their programs. And we are starting to take that -- that is starting to take off. But it is stiff competition. I mean, frankly, in our organization trying to bring in new nuclear talent, it is tough. And so I think Congress is wise, both in the ADVANCE Act and now with this bill before the committee to give unique hiring authorities and finding new ways to compensate these folks to bring the right talent in that is necessary for this moment.

Mr. Tonko. Thank you. And Dr. Huff, did you agree that, you know, how do we get talented people with technical know-how into public service?

Ms. Huff. I think through example and additional engagement with the academic universe, the Congress and the staff at NRC, the staff at DOE can be great examples of what it looks like to have such an excellent job as being a public servant in the career staff. And I think the more engagement those institutions like NRC and DOE have with the public, the more visible it would be to undergraduates and graduates to lose interest in those roles.

Mr. Tonko. Thank you. And I noted in your testimony, your mentioning of NRC's University Nuclear Leadership Program. These NRC grants have supported nuclear engineering education, including at our Rensselaer Polytechic Institute, RPI, located in my district. And, you know, I heard your exchange with Representatives Menendez and McClellan. But would you want to add anything as to how NRC funding is essential to continue to help grow a workforce pipeline that can benefit the private sector, the Commission and the Department of Energy?

Ms. Huff. Thank you, Congressman. Yes, that university nuclear leadership program, which has continued in DOE but was in pause in NRC through the executive order on discretionary funds. That is pivotal to the creation of new nuclear engineers. We support American citizens, American persons through those awards routinely. And it makes up a very large bulk of not only our graduate population, but also scholarships for undergraduates. And when your scholarship says this scholarship came from the NRC or came from DOE, you much more likely to consider that place as your final career.

Mr. Tonko. Well, thank you. I certainly support allowing NRC to be able to offer competitive pay to be able to recruit and retain the personnel they need to carry out their mission. The proposal before us today is a good start in that regard, but it must be said that NRC has lost nearly 500 employees as we have heard earlier today since the beginning of Trump administration. And competitive pay is only part of that story. And it is important for members across the aisle to recognize how big of a disaster DOGE was. What were once seen as stable, fulfilling careers in public service now have this black mark against them because we have real recent evidence that these jobs can be upended with no notice and no respect to Federal employees. And that that will inevitably make it more difficult to recruit that next generation of NRC and DOE Office of Nuclear Energy staff.

So Dr. Huff, I am guessing you may have stayed in touch with some former colleagues at the Department of Energy. Can you explain how the uncertainty and disrespect caused by actions of DOGE have damaged employee morale?

Ms. Huff. I will say a number of them took the prerogative to leave DOE of their own volition shortly after the change in administration, and part of it certainly was morale. But my understanding is that DOE is doing very well and is especially excited about some of the, like, new initiatives, but that can't hold up some of the still empty positions, especially in leadership.

Mr. Tonko. I appreciate that.

So with that, I thank you, Mr. Chairman and I yield back.

Mr. Weber. The gentleman's time has expired. So the chair now recognizes the gentleman from the great State of Texas for 5 minutes.

Mr. Pfluger. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I hear nothing but positive stuff about the NRC about the way they that are doing business, about the way that they are evaluating things. Mr. Merrifield, you will hear a lot from the other side of the aisle on this, like, Oh, the sky is falling, but NRC seems to be doing pretty good right now.

Mr. Merrifield. There actually has been an enabling of some of the folks who were more junior in the workforce, they have been elevated, they have been elevated, they have shown an incredible enthusiasm about trying to re-energize the agency in alignment with the congressionally authorized ADVANCE Act. I think there is a lot of good things going on there.

I understand the concerns, and I understand some of the comments that we made early on about a rubber stamp. I no evidence at the NRC of a rubber stamp.

Mr. Pfluger. It doesn't seem like that is true in any way, shape or form. I will stick with you. I want to talk about we can talk about Abilene Christian's molten salt reactor, I have been working very closely along with other people, both sides of the aisle here on this committee, very proud of what they are doing. What additional things need to happen to achieve criticality on the project?

Mr. Merrifield. Yeah, for the sake of oldness I am an adviser to Abilene Christian University, it is a terrific school. So Schubert, the president, has done an extraordinary job of bringing forward a nuclear program in a university that never had one. They received really assurances from during the first Trump administration that there will be support for that program by the Department of Energy. Based on that, they went ahead and they built a facility that would house their reactor. It is complete, all but the reactor itself in the control room. The issue that they are having is availability of molten salt, that was provided by the Department of Energy, they wanted to have provision of highly enriched uranium, or high-assay low-enriched uranium to fuel that reactor. That is underway, there is a gap. And the gap is that there is the need for roughly $50 million to provide the preparation of that material for use in the reactor.

That has traditionally been the role of the university program at DOE. There is a lot of money that has been deployed for providing HALEU and fuel for others. They are in a Catch-22, they are told, Well, we really want to support you, but there is not enough money in the university program to do that. There are other moneys available. I think it is a crying shame. I think a

small university has made a huge commitment based on government assurances. And frankly, the government is letting them down right now.

Mr. Pfluger. That is exactly what we are working on. This isn't public money, this was private money that was invested here.

Mr. Merrifield. That is correct.

Mr. Pfluger. At the request of the Department of Energy 7 or 8 years ago they have done this and gone through these steps. We are going to keep working on that. I am going to go to --

Mr. Merrifield. I think an important point, every other university research reactor out there receives fuel from the Department of Energy, Abilene Christian should be no exception.

Mr. Pfluger. That is a great point. Thank you for that.

Mr. Harrell, good to see you. Can you maybe discuss the importance of the advanced reactor demonstration program and helping its first-of-a-kind projects move across, from, you know, the concept to deployment phase?

Mr. Harrell. Absolutely. Thank you, Congressman. And thanks for your support for programs like it that are critical to demonstrating an initial reactor design. So ARDP ultimately catalyzed during the first term of the Trump administration, carried forward by the Biden administration, Congress continues to put the resource behind it to make it happen. It is putting leading designs forward, putting them under construction, and ultimately showing their feasibility so then we can show and learn by doing, and then ultimately build out an order book for it. And so real excited in particular about the Texas project X-energy and Seadrift, it is benefiting from it, and it is driving forward their fuel supply chain as well.

Mr. Pfluger. Just of the reforms that are being discussed here today, what is the most important one? And after you answer I will ask our earlier two witnesses the same thing, but what is the most important one?

Mr. Harrell. I would say maybe two things. So one, we have to maximize the Federal

taxpayer dollars that we are already putting forward. This Congress has put forward upwards of $3 billion behind enrichment. So I think the American Enrichment Deployment Act makes a ton of sense. We need to meet that Russia timeline, we have to stay at speed at the national security imperative.

And then two, I think the efficient hearings bill to get rid of the mandatory requirement is a no-brainer it takes a spot out of the process that is not necessary if there is an uncontested hearing. That is exactly the type of thing where we can reduce regulatory boredom at zero sacrifice to safety.

Mr. Pfluger. Thank you. That is the name of the game.

Ms. Korsnick?

Ms. Korsnick. Yes, thank you. I would agree with his assessment on the American Enrichment Deployment Act. I think, you know, that is urgent and necessary to move forward. It is hard on the other ones. Everybody does tweaking, you know, here and there. I don't know, though, that I have a close second. The hearing act that he picked is easy, even the NRC agrees that the mandatory hearings should be changed so it can't get easier than that.

Mr. Pfluger. Ms. Huff, I ran out of time, but if you agree with those --

Ms. Huff. I agree. And I think the REFUEL Act is important too for recycling.

Mr. Pfluger. And if you would like to follow up on anything in writing on that, we would be happy.

With that, Mr. Chairman, thank you.

Mr. Weber. The gentleman yields back.

The gentleman recognizes the gentlelady from Washington for at least 5 minutes.

Ms. Schrier. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you to all our witnesses.

As we pursue expansion of nuclear power, Russia has 45 percent of the world's uranium enrichment capacity and the U.S. only has one enrichment plant. With the ban on Russian imports such as START in 2028, it is extremely urgent, as many of you have mentioned, that we accelerate our

domestic enrichment capacity to ensure energy security of us and our allies.

I am encouraged that this committee is discussing these bills, including the American Enrichment Deployment Act. This bill intends to more efficiently license domestic enrichment facilities by bringing the licensing process for enrichment in line with the process for other fuels, which are allowed to start construction at their own risk before the issuance of a license, just knowing that they will be shut down or delayed if they are not in compliance. And I have brought this up with NRC Commissioner Weaver at a previous hearing and he was supportive of this reform in concept. So now it is just a matter of getting the language exactly right to make sure that the outcome matches the intent.

RPTR KERR

EDTR SECKMAN

[12:16 p.m.]

Ms. Schrier. Commissioner Merrifield, thank you for your testimony and the acknowledgment of sort of a changing situation and your perceptions.

Widespread deployment of advanced reactors is just around the corner. What happens if we don't have sufficient domestic enrichment capabilities here in the U.S.?

Mr. Merrifield. If we do not have the ability to provide high-assay low-enriched uranium for some of these advanced reactors, it will hinder their deployment. We simply will not -- we well be able to build the reactors but not have the fuel to do it. I think there has been extraordinary progress in this area.

I would say there is one other thing that I would posit for you. We have a problem right now in providing uranium for U.S. content. Virtually all that we have comes from abroad. For the civilian fleet, that is not as big a problem. For the U.S. military and the Navy, which are beginning to spin up their own enrichment programs, that has to be U.S. sourced. We need more attention to that as well.

Ms. Schrier. Thank you, and that is also on this committee's watch and agenda. I wanted to thank you for that comment.

I want to turn to nuclear licensing now. Reforming the licensing hearing process is another way that we can streamline licensing for fuel production, nuclear reactors, and when no one is even contesting the approval of a license for a project, NRC is currently still required to hold a hearing that takes thousands of man-hours to prepare for.

My bill with Representative Griffith solves this issue by only requiring a hearing when the issue is contested, and it allows the NRC staff to really focus their energy where it should be, which is

on disputed applications.

Mandatory uncontested hearings have already slowed down licensing of three advanced nuclear reactors where there is zero opposition. Three more have submitted license applications and will still need a hearing, again, even if there is no opposition to the projects. Dropping this hearing requirement when no one contests the project just seems like the smart thing to do.

Mr. Merrifield. Yes.

Ms. Schrier. I see nodding with all of our witnesses.

Now, I just want to make certain that we still preserve the public's ability to request a contested hearing if they want one. So, Ms. Korsnick, this question is for you. The NRC in March proposed a rule that might change the public's ability to do so. Do your member companies believe this proposed rule would change or discourage public engagement or opposition to a project or limit access to information so they would know whether to contest a project?

Ms. Korsnick. Just to be clear, the mandatory hearings don't even engage the public. So the mandatory hearings happen at the end of the process, and the public is not invited. So that is how crazy this mandatory hearing is. When we say it has no impact on public engagement, it is because they are not invited to it. So there is, like, zero pain by having this mandatory hearing not happen.

To your point, earlier in the process, the public is invited. There was all kinds of opportunity. And, to your point, no, this will have no impact on the public having that ability to have a hearing process, a contested process.

They use this term "mandatory hearing." It is simply at the end of the process, an NRC-only process, that they named mandatory hearing so you have the feeling that somehow the public is involved, and they are not.

Mr. Merrifield. Congresswoman, I was a member of a commission 20 years ago that called for elimination of that requirement. I am very supportive of what you are trying to do. I agree

with everything that Maria just said.

I would also say, frankly, the agency is trying to do some workarounds relative to how those are undertaken. Legislation is important. This is a great fix.

Ms. Schrier. Thank you for your comments. I just want to make sure that we streamline and also protect public interest and the ability to speak up and contest if there is a problem.

Mr. Merrifield. Absolutely.

Ms. Schrier. Thank you. I yield back.

Mr. Weber. The gentlelady yields back.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Oregon for 5 minutes.

Mr. Bentz. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thanks to the panel for being here.

Ms. Korsnick, I very much liked the executive summary of your testimony, so thank you for that.

You mentioned in answer to a previous question that you would allow construction to a point under the American Enrichment Deployment Act. I think I understand what you are saying, but why don't you explain to me how you would select that point.

Ms. Korsnick. Yes. Basically, you can do slight preparation. You can do certain things, but you can't move forward by bringing special nuclear material onsite. You can't actually begin enriching without a license. So the stuff that you can do in advance is construction-type work but not any operation or receiving of special products.

Mr. Bentz. The team, other witnesses on the panel?

Mr. Merrifield. After I left the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, I went to work for the Shaw Group. We built the Urenco facility for enrichment out in New Mexico. Those buildings are relatively straightforward civil construction. It is a pad. It looks a lot like a commercial building.

The safety-significant issues are really the centrifuges themselves and how they are piped together. So that nonsafety-significant work can continue. It is not going to have an impact on

public health. Obviously, it is done at the risk of the applicant, but I think the commonsense reforms included in the legislation make sense.

Mr. Bentz. Right. So it seems to me that, Ms. Huff, for example, suggested in her testimony, written testimony, that there could be a problem in bringing pressure on the agency because it had allowed the facility to go forward and then would be in no position to say "stop." And that is an estoppel argument. I am a lawyer. I know how that works.

Forgive me. I am going to have to move on, but I appreciate --

Mr. Merrifield. I would respectfully disagree with that viewpoint.

Mr. Bentz. You are in the position to do so. You are an expert. But since I have you --

Mr. Merrifield. No, I mean the viewpoint expressed by my counterpart.

Mr. Bentz. Let me shift over to the Crane Clean Energy Center, formerly known as Three Mile Island. I have read reports regarding the rejuvenation of that facility, but there seemed to be some concern that, once it gets up and going, there will be additional unforeseen costs that somehow the public ratepayers or the taxpayer would end up paying. Who is in charge of making sure that doesn't happen?

Mr. Merrifield. Well, I don't know all the details that entail your question. I would say there are sort of two pieces. The NRC has under its authority the regulation of the reactor and to make sure that, before it goes into operation, that it is safe. You have an economic regulator potentially in the State that would have authority over how that cost is shifted to ratepayers. So those are really two different arenas.

From an NRC Federal standpoint, as an NRC regulator, I mean, ultimately we were mindful of the costs that we imposed, but we did not reduce our safety mission for that reason. If it needed to be done for safety purposes, the NRC required it to be implemented, and I don't think that has changed.

Mr. Bentz. I am not sure if that answers the question, but it seems to me that someone

should be looking into the rebuilding of these facilities, and the enthusiasm that seems to accompany the initial investment; when we need 30 or 40 years to actually pay that thing back and recognizing it is an older facility, it seems to me to be something we should be concerned about, at least the ratepayer should.

I want to go back to Ms. Korsnick for several more questions. I am looking at your second bullet point: Accelerate new nuclear deployment by, quote, "addressing early project cost and schedule risk and, thus, enabling private sector investment." I don't understand that. Can you explain?

Ms. Korsnick. Yes. I would say it is hard to go first in nuclear. It is hard to have the first-of-a-kind build, and there is additional risk associated with that fact because it hasn't been built yet, and so private investment is taking a look, and they are wanting to have more confidence.

So one of the things that has been proposed, the ARC Act, is to help have a government participate in risk sharing. So you can imagine if you are running a project, the first part is on the owner. Then there is a second part, after, say, 20 percent, that there would be some government-private sector risk sharing to a capped limit, after which it would be back all on the owner. So some structure that would send a signal to the private investment that that early move or risk is being reduced. It is being ameliorated.

And this isn't for all of them. This is just maybe for the first few of a kind so that it could demonstrate. Then that private sector money comes in. They see what the cost is. They see what the schedule is. They understand.

Mr. Bentz. Thank you for that clarification.

I thank all of you for your testimony. I yield back.

Mr. Weber. The gentleman yields back.

Now the chair now recognizes the gentleman from the great State of Texas for 5 minutes.

Mr. Veasey. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to, first of all, say I am proud to be the cosponsor of both 5549 and 3978. I don't think that this is a partisan issue at all. I believe that advanced nuclear energy is going to be very essential to a reliable, affordable, cleaner grid. And, frankly, the Chinese or the Russians or any other adversaries, they are not going to wait around for us to get our regulatory act in order. They are going to be moving ahead, and we need to make sure that we are doing the same thing.

I think 5549 is a very sensible fix to what we need to do. The mandatory hearings on uncontested applications consume a lot of hours of NRC staff and adds on about an average time of 6 months, and that is just unacceptable.

3978 I think clears real ambiguity standing in the way of domestic recycling technology. That could go a really long way in helping us reduce waste and strengthen our fuel security. I think both of these reforms have been called for across administrations and across party lines.

And, that said, I want to be direct, though. I think that everything that we are trying to accomplish here, the deployment, the investment, the international credibility, it really rests on one foundation, and that is a credible NRC -- not independent as a political talking point but independent as a structural reality.

Dr. Huff said well in her testimony that regulatory independence is most important when significant financial interests are at stake. So now we are talking about billions of dollars at stake, and I think the committee, we have to make sure that we have efficiency reforms that don't inadvertently erode the credibility that makes American nuclear regulation the global gold standard -- that don't erode that standard that we have here.

So, Dr. Huff, I wanted to ask you, because I am a cosponsor of 5549, and I believe the case for these efficiency reforms are strong, but you raise something in your testimony that I want to explore further. You noted that the ACRS has contributed to safety review of virtually every generation of commercial reactor technology that we have deployed and that independent expertise is valuable when it is empowered to disagree.

My question is about the implementation. As the NRC executes its reform, what should this committee be watching to make sure that the Commission is actively and appropriately using ACRS, not just technically complying with the law?

Ms. Huff. Thank you so much, Congressman. I appreciate it. I think especially your comments with regard to financial pressure on NRC get back to Congressman Bentz' concern with my testimony, which was intended to suggest that a redress plan may be a helpful component of that law.

Moving on to your comments about the ACRS, I think everyone on this panel agrees it is valuable in precisely this way, that it provides a technical sort of second opinion for the staff for this oversight of all reactors.

In terms of the efficiencies, I think it has been made clear that reducing the amount of unnecessary meetings that either NRC or ACRS has is great, but remaining flexible with regard to what ACRS believes is important, if they feel strongly that there is a technical concern to be addressed, I think enshrining in law that they can't ask that question kind of goes against some of the intent for providing their technical expertise. In many ways, technical expertise sometimes comes in the form of a question.

Mr. Veasey. Yes. Yes.

I know you also flagged that the NRC has paused its discretionary grant programs: the undergraduate scholarships, the graduate fellowships, the community college assistance, the faculty advancement grants. And you said that that was unsustainable, and I agree. I think that is not good at all for us trying to make sure we are winning a competition.

The pay bill addresses one in the pipeline. Who addresses the other? And should this committee be asking the NRC directly why those grants are paused at exactly the moment we need to be expanding the technical workforce, because that is an area where I have heard a lot of bipartisan agreement, is that this technical workforce is hugely important?

Ms. Huff. Thank you, Congressman. Indeed, it is baffling to have those grants on pause. They were the result of an executive order associated with oversight on discretionary granting across the agencies, and the NRC still hasn't released those awards from fiscal year 2024.

DOE has moved forward many of those sort of awards under the same program in UNLP, the University Nuclear Leadership Program, and it has been baffling for the university community to see NRC not follow suit.

Mr. Veasey. Thank you very much.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Goldman. [Presiding.] Thank you, Mr. Veasey.

The chair recognizes the gentleman from South Carolina, Mr. Fry, for 5 minutes.

Mr. Fry. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this important hearing today. I thank you to the witnesses for being here.

I am glad to see that this subcommittee is still continuing to focus intently on nuclear energy. As I have said before, the nuclear renaissance is here, and I believe that South Carolina has an important role to play in that.

I support the efforts to improve the timelines, timeliness, and predictability of Nuclear Regulatory Commission licensing decisions, which are essential to advancing next generation nuclear technologies and strengthening grid reliability. At the same time, I am equally focused on ensuring that new nuclear development is cost-effective for customers.

I have had ongoing discussions with groups like Duke Energy and the Palmetto Nuclear Coalition and other stakeholders about how to better manage and contain project cost. We have to take the lessons of South Carolina, specifically V.C. Summer, seriously by ensuring that future projects are structured so as not to place an undue financial burden on taxpayers and the ratepayers of the Carolinas, or really the United States.

This is particularly important as Duke Energy actively evaluates the potential development of

new reactors in South Carolina, and the State continues to consider pathways for the partially completed V.C. Summer units.

With that said, nuclear projects are certainly capital intensive but operate for many decades with some lasting 80 years. Unfortunately, as I have talked about before, V.C. Summer shows that cost overruns and delays can have real big impact on projects, oftentimes resulting in the abandonment of those projects, which saddled ratepayers with the cost of nuclear plants that actually weren't producing anything because they didn't exist. All of this I think has scared investors probably away from nuclear right when we need it the most.

Mr. Harrell, how can the bills that we discussed today -- and you talked a little bit about this earlier in your testimony, but how can these bills, which are focused on regulatory modernization, help companies with financing?

Mr. Harrell. Time is money, Congressman, and so, in the end, a predictable, efficient permitting process that the public has confidence in and that has strong safety protocols in place is good for innovation. It is good for deployment. Investors want to know that there is a schedule that is going to be followed even on long lead items like nuclear that are going to take longer than maybe your traditional investments. They want to make sure that process is moving efficiently.

Mr. Fry. Thank you for that.

Ms. Korsnick, turning to spent nuclear fuel and our nuclear waste policy, you note in your testimony that we should advance an integrated fuel management and recycling strategy that preserves ratepayer interest and Federal contractual obligations. Can you elaborate on what you mean here, especially about preserving ratepayer interest?

Ms. Korsnick. Well, yes. Ratepayers have paid into a fund directed from the Nuclear Waste Policy Act, and when they paid that money, it was for long-term storage, a deep geologic repository, and so we think that recycling is a wonderful addition. We think it is part of closing the fuel cycle. We just want to ensure that the money that ratepayers put away specifically for the

purpose of long-term deep geologic repository is spent in that way.

And so those are the conversations, if you will, that are playing out now.

Mr. Fry. South Carolina ratepayers, from what I can see, have contributed, with interest, about $3 billion to the nuclear waste fund. Should we make sure that this fund is used for credible, durable policies to address that nuclear waste?

Ms. Korsnick. Yes, absolutely. As I mentioned, I think the move toward recycling starts with, I will say, small scale, and then it has to get raised to commercial scale. There is a lot, I would say, to learn and to discover, and so we just need to be thoughtful about what part of that that ratepayers pay for.

Mr. Fry. Thank you for that.

The Advisory Committee on Reactor Safeguards was formed at a time when almost all new nuclear technology was new, and there was a need to have maybe a variety of expert advice. That is not necessarily the case today. I think some of your testimony has exhibited that with the NRC.

Do you agree with that, Mr. Merrifield?

Mr. Merrifield. I absolutely do agree with that. I think they serve a valuable purpose, but if we were to have more AP1000s built in South Carolina, that technology is well understood. Having ACRS review those would be, to me, a waste of time.

Mr. Fry. Ms. Korsnick, do you agree with that as well?

Ms. Korsnick. Yes. I think the ACRS plays a role. I think we can do it more efficiently.

Mr. Fry. But we should anticipate, I think, that there would be new designs, technologies, and other matters that would still benefit the NRC and the public through this outside expert review and public comments. Would you agree with that?

Ms. Korsnick. Yes.

Mr. Fry. Mr. Chairman, you are going to cut me off here in a second, and I am not going to like it at all. I have more questions. But I really appreciate you-all's time today. Thank you for

being here.

Mr. Goldman. I have got a big gavel here to cut you off, Mr. Fry.

Mr. Fry. A Texan would have a big gavel.

Mr. Goldman. That is exactly right. Thank you, Mr. Fry.

The chair recognizes the gentlewoman from North Dakota, Mrs. Fedorchak, for her 5 minutes.

Mrs. Fedorchak. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to my colleague from Colorado for letting me jump ahead of him in line. I appreciate that.

Thank you all for being here to share your expertise on such an important topic. I watched as a State utility regulator 10 to 12 years ago -- I watched our country turn away from nuclear, regrettably, and it is really encouraging to see how quickly we are pivoting back. A lot to do with all of your leadership and then some of the great work that has happened here in Congress in the last 5 or so years.

Mr. Harrell, North Dakota is a State without nuclear. We have a lot of coal-fired power. We have a lot of gas. We have a lot of oil and gas development. We have a lot of wind generation. So we are an all-of-the-above State, except for we don't have any nuclear assets. There is a lot of interest in that, and there are discussions happening.

But can you talk a little bit about the changes that are being proposed with some of the legislation we are talking about today? And talk about how you think that will help States like North Dakota sort of pursue nuclear resources, nuclear power development in the future.

Mr. Harrell. Absolutely. Thank you, Congresswoman, for the question, and I think it is spot on because I think there are a lot of States like North Dakota who in this moment want to explore adding nuclear into their mix.

I think the reforms on the bills today continue to reinforce that there is a predictable regulatory process that includes public participation so that your constituents can have confidence both in the technical aspects of the technology as well as be certain that, ultimately, these projects

can deliver power in a relevant time frame, as you all wrestle with rising demand in North Dakota.

I also think that you are seeing States that want to be fast followers here on these first-of-a-kind, do things like feasibility studies, sighting and permitting work, workforce development areas. A couple of States like Ohio and Virginia have established nuclear authorities to try to foster these opportunities. I think that is the type of thing that North Dakota could do.

And then Ms. Korsnick referenced earlier we have got to get regulators, like your previous self, over the hump. So policies like the ARC Act are the type of things that can ensure that the project two, three, four have a new design, gets off the ground, that we share the risk on that, and regulators can have the confidence that that, ultimately, is going to be a good return for the taxpayer and be a long-term investment for the State's energy future.

Mrs. Fedorchak. Excellent. Thank you for that.

Ms. Korsnick, increased nuclear capacity means increased use of uranium fuels. As a country and a legislative body, we have encountered issues finding places to store our spent fuel. Can you describe how a built-out nuclear recycling supply chain limits the need to find and house spent fuel in a natural repository?

Ms. Korsnick. Sure. Thank you for the question.

In our recycling process, you take some of that used fuel, and you actually use it again to feed a reactor as new fuel. And so, as you continue to do that, you could lower the volume of fuel that you have that needs to be stored. That is a long-term vision, and so it is going to take us a while to commercialize and scale up the idea of recycling, but that is in the main -- the reason that it is helpful to close the fuel cycle is because you can use today what is used fuel and turn it into new fuel for a reactor.

Mrs. Fedorchak. So the goal of getting a long-term repository has been something that has been out of reach for quite a while. Do you think it is realistic that we might get the refueling process in place faster than a permanent storage solution?

Ms. Korsnick. Actually, I think you need the whole picture. Even with recycling, you still need a geologic repository. Maybe that is boreholes. Maybe it is a mine repository. I think it is probably a combination of those. So please don't think that it is one or the other. It is really both.

Mrs. Fedorchak. Okay.

Mr. Merrifield. I think the industry has really moved forward in this area, both recycling and other alternative means of disposing of fuel. We have the world's first nuclear repository that has opened in Finland. More movement has been made. So we haven't been gathering dust.

Mrs. Fedorchak. Okay. I have got 30 seconds left.

What else can this body do to support this effort, both on the permanent and the recycling processes?

Ms. Korsnick. I think the Nuclear REFUEL Act is a good step forward in terms of bringing attention to it. As I mentioned earlier, I would actually like to broaden it to all recycling and reprocessing methods to be considered nonproduction facilities and be licensed under part 70, which is meant for fuel facilities. I think that would be appropriate for all technologies.

Mrs. Fedorchak. Okay. My time has expired. I yield back. Thank you.

Mr. Goldman. Thank you.

The chair recognizes the gentleman from Colorado, Mr. Evans, for his 5 minutes of questioning.

Mr. Evans. Thank you, Chair and Ranking Member.

Thank you, of course, to the witnesses for taking some time to come out and talk to us today.

I am from Colorado. We know what is happening. Energy demand is rising rapidly. I have got utilities in my district that are expecting to triple demand in the next 10 years, and that is after already doubling it in the last 10 years. And, unfortunately, the energy policies in Colorado right now -- not my numbers, the Democrat-controlled Colorado energy office -- say that their plan to get to net zero emissions is going to cost $60 billion plus.

And, as we are doing that, they are actually making less electricity per Federal data; 58,000 gigawatt hours 2 years ago and only 56,000 gigawatt hours this year. So people are paying more money for less electricity, less reliable electricity.

And one of the ways we can fix that is with nuclear. It is baseload dispatchable. It is very low emissions. It helps keep prices stable, prevents blackouts, preemptive shutouts. And permitting reform is an essential piece of being able to bring this energy back onto the grid. I have been proud to work on a bipartisan permitting reform framework with some of my colleagues actually on this committee and across the aisle, Mr. Peters being one, which has got the support of about 50 bipartisan Members of Congress.

And one of the things in that platform is eliminating the uncontested mandatory NRC hearings for new reactors, and that is reflected in one of bills before us today, Mr. Griffith's bill. And, in previous conversations, experts have testified that that could reduce permitting timelines by 6 months without compromising public safety or engagement, and so I am super excited to see this bill moving.

My first question -- to Mr. Harrell -- is going to be to you. We have got innovation happening all over the Nation and even in the State of Colorado. Buckley Air Force Base, or Space Force Base, they are under a Department of War contract to bring microreactor technology.

In my district, we have got the old Fort St. Vrain Nuclear Plant, which has now got nuclear storage for about 33,000 pounds of spent fuel.

So, Mr. Harrell, what is the current status of the NRC's major rulemakings under the Trump administration? And how do today's proposals help build on that so we can actually get nuclear technology on the grid?

Mr. Harrell. That is a great question, Congressman. And thank you for your leadership on permit reform. Beyond the things that are nuclear specific here, we need to be modernizing our grid and really bringing new generation of all types to the marketplace quickly to meet rising

demand.

On the NRC side, we are in a critical moment, right. A lot of the regulatory actions that have come forth in the last 3 months have been a result of you all's bipartisan leadership over the last 10 years, from NEIMA, from the ADVANCE Act. And so we are now seeing those come to fruition, and there are some real-world examples of where we are seeing results coming from those type of reforms.

I mean, I would underscore in Texas X-energy project. Without the work that you all did over the last 5 years, there is no way the NRC would have ultimately landed on an NEA for that project to do the environmental in under 12 months. And these bills build on that type of momentum, right. We need to keep plugging forward and showing the marketplace that we have got a regulator that is nimble, that is predictable, that is diligent, and that is ultimately going to put U.S. nuclear leadership in the forefront.

Mr. Evans. Thank you for that.

Mr. Merrifield, I am going to come to you next, Chairman. I mentioned that 33,000 pounds of spent fuel that we have in my district in Colorado. So part of this whole nuclear conversation, of course, involves the supply chains, from being able to produce the fuels, mill and refine the fuels, use them. But then, obviously, what is the end of lifecycle for those fuels?

So the question for you today, and I know we have already talked about it some, but if there is anything to add about what is the legislation today that we are talking about, or are there other things that we need to talk about to help the U.S. establish that complete fuel cycle, specifically including that end-of-life fuel? And can modern technology help reuse that?

Mr. Merrifield. I think the legislation today is going to be helpful in helping to spur innovation in recycling used nuclear fuel. There are, by my count, probably seven or eight different companies out there that are pursuing different types of potential recycling of that material. As Maria described, it would really help utilize that material in a very appropriate way. And, frankly,

the massive amount of energy that it still contains would be something that could help power our Nation's nuclear fleet.

So that is an area I think we will see more coming out of the NRC. We will see more that probably Congress will need to assist in that area that is quite exciting.

I do think we need to put some attention to the front end of the fuel cycle. Uranium production, conversion, having sufficient enrichment, all of these pieces come together for us to be able to build and sustain a nuclear fleet.

Mr. Evans. I also will get gaveled if I keep going. So I am out of time and will yield back.

Mr. Goldman. Thank you, Mr. Evans.

The chair recognizes Dr. Joyce from Pennsylvania for his 5 minutes of questioning.

Mr. Joyce. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Ranking Member Castor, for holding this important hearing.

And thank you for our witnesses for being here today.

Recently, I had the opportunity to travel with Chairman Latta, as well as other colleagues from the Energy Subcommittee, on a bipartisan congressional delegation to France, looking at their nuclear energy. There we heard from companies and government officials on how successful their expansion and use of nuclear energy has been.

Since their large-scale expansion plan started in the mid-1970s, France has transformed themselves from an energy importer to an energy exporter, bolstering their economy while also relying on nuclear generation for a significant portion of their domestic energy needs. As we talk about achieving American energy dominance, I believe we can learn from the efforts in France.

Already in places like my home State of Pennsylvania, we are seeing the expansion of nuclear generation. Just over 100 miles from where we are sitting here today, Constellation Energy is well on their way to bringing the Crane Clean Energy Center back online.

America has an advantage over France, though: Vast fossil fuel resources, like the natural

gas that is underneath the feet of my constituents. This will allow us to even further leverage nuclear as it is brought online to improve our electrical grid and ensure reliable and affordable energy for all Americans.

Ms. Korsnick, you mentioned in your testimony the momentum that is building up behind the deployment of new nuclear generation assets. How would the regulatory reforms under consideration today help bolster that momentum?

Ms. Korsnick. Yes, it is, I would say, critical because it brings that regulatory predictability, and Mr. Harrell has mentioned that a few times today. If you want investment in nuclear, you have to demonstrate that you are going to take that great idea, and it is going to actually turn into a power plant. It is going to turn into energy, and it is going to get on the grid, or it is going to turn into high temperature steam, and it is going to go to your factory, and it is going to be put to use.

So the ambiguity around nuclear starts in the regulatory process. How long is it actually going to take for me to get that license or that construction permit? So the things that you are focused on here helps bring that predictability, which is crucial.

Mr. Joyce. Is that ambiguity that you talk about, does that stifle innovation? Does that stifle the progress that is so necessary?

Ms. Korsnick. Well, yes, because it just takes too long to get to the marketplace, right. Innovation feeds on "I not only had the great idea, but I turned the great idea into a widget that works that I can bring to the marketplace." Well, if you can't get it to the marketplace, clearly, it stifles.

Mr. Joyce. You mentioned the success of executive orders in helping improve regulations. Do you agree that codified regulatory reforms would provide further confidence for developers to invest in upgrades and new deployments of nuclear assets?

Ms. Korsnick. Absolutely.

Mr. Joyce. Mr. Merrifield, do you agree that ensuring any regulatory improvements apply

both to new nuclear generation and restarting or upgrading existing assets will aid the expansion of nuclear capacity of the grid?

Mr. Merrifield. Yes.

Mr. Joyce. Mr. Harrell, can you discuss how effectively deploying nuclear energy domestically can ultimately affect the United States' global competitiveness?

Mr. Harrell. Absolutely, sir. We have to first learn by -- we have to do first, right, and show the globe that we can build these reactors and designs and demonstrate these technologies. But, in the end, the diplomatic partnerships that happen in nuclear are century-long agreements, and China and Russia are going on offense on that.

We are seeing those countries ultimately go to partners who are interested in nuclear, an immense amount of countries showing interest in new nuclear because of what it can bring to them for energy security. And they are offering fuel take back. They are offering investments in the technology to build out. They are even willing to staff it in many cases.

We are never going to out-subsidize China, but what we can do is use better technology and ultimately the tools that we have in our toolbelt, whether that is the Export-Import Bank of the U.S., which is up for reauthorization, the great work that Congress recently did in a bipartisan way to reauthorize the Development Finance Corporation, and other tools in the toolbelt to provide U.S. offerings and ultimately become competitive in the market.

Mr. Joyce. You talk about China and Russia both being on the offense. Is it time we get off the sidelines and implement and allow the regulations to step aside so we can become part of that game again?

Mr. Harrell. It is a national security imperative for us to lead. I wouldn't say that we need to step away from the regulations. We need to show that we are a diligent, efficient regulator and that the rest of the globe can trust the diligence we have done on --

Mr. Joyce. As we watch momentum build in the nuclear domain, I look forward to working

with this committee to ensure that Federal regulations are aligned with industry realities so that we can all benefit from affordable, reliable energy.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for allowing me to waive on, and I yield back.

Mr. Goldman. Thank you, Dr. Joyce.

The chair recognizes myself for 5 minutes of questioning, seeing how there is no one left here right now. That doesn't mean someone may walk in.

But, Mr. Merrifield, can I follow up with you? I know Mr. Pfluger from Texas talked about the SMR in Abilene, and you mentioned your involvement with it. Can you follow up on that? I understand there is a bump in the road that we hope to rectify quickly, but let's talk about nationally.

What other SMRs are out there? I think we are all in agreement that that is a future. That is something that we are all excited about, both on the Republican and Democrat side. So what other SMRs are out there, and how close are we for them to come online?

Mr. Merrifield. Well, I think there is a lot of movement we are seeing. You have TerraPower, which has its site in Kemmerer, Wyoming, that is under construction. X-energy, which is a high temperature gas, is moving forward well, which is the Seadrift site in Texas. I think a number of States have announced moving forward.

We have got the restart of the Palisades Plant, the Crane Energy Center announcement of Duane Arnold in Iowa, which were previously considered reactors. The State of South Carolina has an effort underway right now with trying to bring Summer unit two and three, which were the Westinghouse reactors that started getting them back on board.

I talked to a utility executive of a large nuclear utility very recently. They had brought in experts to look at, do we go with gas; do we go with nuclear? And they realized they really have to go with nuclear. So a lot of movement. All of the advanced reactor work we have done by DOE and elsewhere are really bring things forward. So there is a huge amount of activity underway.

Mr. Goldman. So that is great news. How far do you think we are from cities being

powered by SMRs?

Mr. Merrifield. Well, I think some of the microreactors are quite far along, and I think, because they are smaller and easier to deploy, I think we will see some of those put on the grid quicker. A large gigawatt size reactor like the Westinghouse AP1000, you know, you order one today, and it is going to take you probably 7 or 8 years to get it up and operating with all of the approvals and requirements and whatnot. But I think we are making real progress.

The other thing I would mention quickly, Ontario has GE BWRX-300s that are under construction right now. Those were developed in Wilmington, North Carolina, by GE Vernova. We are going to see more of those in the U.S. as well.

Mr. Goldman. And I was going to follow up with are there economics there for them to compete, let's say, with natural gas?

Mr. Merrifield. Nuclear is a higher upfront investment, in part, because of the interest cost, but I think, if you look at the long-range value of nuclear, it beats everything, including gas over the long range.

Mr. Goldman. Thank you very much. I am going to yield back the balance of my time.

I will recognize Mr. Griffith for 5 minutes of questioning.

Mr. Griffith. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman, for letting me waive on. Sorry I haven't been here earlier. I was out doing other things, and I am not a regular member of the subcommittee. I am waiving on. I used to be, and it is a great sub.

But one of the bills the subcommittee is discussing is a bill that Dr. Schrier, Representative Veasey, and myself introduced, H.R. 6464, the Efficient Nuclear Licensing Hearings Act, and our bill amends the Atomic Energy Act to repeal the requirements for mandatory nuclear licensing hearings.

Mr. Harrell, do you believe that these hearings actually contribute to stopping unsafe reactor designs?

Mr. Harrell. No, I do not. They are at the end of the process when they are uncontested,

and so, by eliminating it, we have already had the diligence by the NRC before.

Mr. Griffith. It is kind of duplicative, and it is something that has hung around since, what, 1957, and if nobody asks for it, it really doesn't do much. Isn't that correct?

Mr. Harrell. Correct.

Mr. Griffith. And this would make things a little -- streamline them without sacrificing any safety, correct?

Mr. Harrell. Exactly. It could save thousands of hours of preparation that happen by NRC staff, up to a million dollars for this process, and delays application approvals by 6 months on average.

Mr. Griffith. So it causes delays; it runs up costs and has no net benefit for the public.

Mr. Harrell. Exactly.

Mr. Griffith. It sounds like a good bill. I am glad I introduced it. Thank you.

Ms. Korsnick, when we talk about mandatory hearings, nuclear reactor applicants have to pay the NRC engineering staff to examine its application by the hour. Isn't that correct?

Ms. Korsnick. That is correct.

Mr. Griffith. And so that is kind of the cost we were talking about, isn't that accurate, when we have these extra hearings that are not beneficial?

Ms. Korsnick. Absolutely. It runs up cost needlessly.

Mr. Griffith. And how much does an applicant pay the Commission staff per hour to examine its application? Not sure?

Ms. Korsnick. I don't know. I think it is on the order of $300 an hour.

Mr. Merrifield. $300, $325, in that range, per hour, per staff.

Mr. Griffith. So not quite Philadelphia lawyer fees but higher than your average worker in the Ninth Congressional District of Virginia.

Mr. Merrifield. Well, when we have a dozen NRC staff who are sitting around the table, it

adds up quick.

Mr. Griffith. Yes. So you are talking $300 plus times 12 or --

Mr. Merrifield. That is right.

Mr. Griffith. -- 8 or 15. All right.

Mr. Merrifield. And, by the way, the NRC -- I was a Commissioner. We called for elimination of these hearings over 20 years ago. This is long overdue.

Mr. Griffith. Does anybody disagree with that? I mean, I will give the naysayers a chance.

Ms. Korsnick. Even the NRC agrees.

Mr. Griffith. All right.

Well, Mr. Chairman, it sounds like, without using up my whole 5 minutes, that everybody is in agreement that the bill that Dr. Schrier, Representative Veasey, and myself introduced, H.R. 6464, ought to move forward. And I appreciate their testimony and their time here today, and I yield back.

Mr. Goldman. Thank you, Mr. Griffith.

The chair recognizes Congressman Miller-Meeks from Iowa for her 5 minutes of questioning.

Ms. Miller-Meeks. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and I thank Representative Griffith for waving on.

The current increased rates that people are experiencing right now are due to 4 years of a deterrence of energy generation and energy subtraction from the Biden administration. So let me also say that Iowans and Americans are very appreciative of this hearing.

The United States is entering a new era of nuclear deployment, and the institutions responsible for licensing and oversight must be ready to meet it. Advanced reactors are moving from concept to construction. Retired plants are seeking to restart, such as the one in Iowa, and domestic fuel infrastructure is being rebuilt from the ground up after decades of atrophy.

Congress has a narrow window to remove the remaining friction to clear the procedural

backlog that slows restart applications, align enrichment licensing with the rest of the fuel cycle, and make sure the NRC has the staff to handle what is coming. The opportunity is real, but it is not going to wait indefinitely.

Mr. Merrifield, you have been calling for the elimination of mandatory uncontested hearings since your time on the Commission, and you support refocusing the ACRS on genuinely novel safety-significant issues. Duane Arnold is a proven boiling water reactor with decades of operational history. There is nothing novel about the technology and nothing contested about the community's desire to see it back online.

Can you tell us concretely how much time and cost these two reforms together could save a restart applicant like NextEra? And is there any safety justification for requiring either a mandatory uncontested hearing or a full ACRS review for a plant that was operating safely just 5 years ago?

Mr. Merrifield. I would say, in this case, I don't think either one is necessary. In terms of the total savings, it would likely range, you know, in the millions of dollars and certainly significant time both on the part of the NRC and of the applicant.

Now, I would put one caveat. There may be a unique circumstance that could be identified where the Commission might want to have the ACRS look at it. This legislation would not at all impose on the ability to do that if the Commission felt that that review was needed.

Ms. Miller-Meeks. So safety for the community would certainly be paramount in that situation?

Mr. Merrifield. Safety is paramount. I don't think this legislation does anything to erode that.

Ms. Miller-Meeks. Mr. Harrell, the conversation around nuclear energy is often framed as an energy policy issue, but increasingly it is also a matter of economic competitiveness, supply chain resilience, and national security.

Today, Russia remains the dominant supplier in the global nuclear market providing reactor

technology, fuel services, financing, and long-term operational support to countries around the world. China is making significant investments to expand its nuclear footprint as part of a broader strategy to increase its economic and geopolitical influence.

Given that reality, can you discuss why domestic deployment matters for American leadership abroad? Specifically, how does American success strengthen the ability of U.S. companies to compete globally and provide allies with an alternative to Russia and China suppliers?

Mr. Harrell. First and foremost, I think we have got the premier technologies here, and folks want to work with the U.S., but the critical issue at the moment is we need to be able to deploy here, and we need to be able to deploy efficiently.

The NRC is a critical regulator that is recognized globally. So success going through that process is instrumental and confidence in doing this globally as well. So we have to do here first and meet our constituents' needs, obviously, or the U.S. consumers' needs, and then we have products that we can then market abroad.

Folks want to partner with the U.S. These are century-long partnerships, and they are going to have confidence in this technology as entrepreneurs and innovators are raising to the marketplace.

Mr. Merrifield. Congresswoman, I was in Rwanda 2 weeks ago at a ministerial meeting hosted by the president of Rwanda. Twelve countries. The message was we want American technologies. I forgot to mention a New Jersey-based company that has a 300 megawatt reactor signed an agreement there for a cooperative agreement. That was great news. It wasn't a Chinese signing. It wasn't a Russian signing. It was an America company, and that is a good thing.

Ms. Miller-Meeks. Well, I was going to say we used to be the leader in all nuclear energy with the capacity to train nuclear engineers and then that stopped.

I have a question for Ms. Korsnick. I am going to submit it to the record to have you answer.

And, Mr. Merrifield, you testified that NRC is now more efficient, risk-informed, and results

oriented than any other point in the past 20 years. Are restart applicants actually experiencing that cultural change in their interactions with NRC staff, or is the improvement concentrated in the advanced reactor licensing division, while the teams handling convention license actions remain more conservative?

Mr. Merrifield. I think the licensing activity associated with Holtec Palisades restart went quite well, and we are ahead of time. I would expect the lessons that the NRC staff learned from that would inure well to the benefit of the review that NextEra will have for Duane Arnold. I would expect that one will go very smoothly.

Ms. Miller-Meeks. Thank you very much. I yield back.

Mr. Goldman. Thank you.

With that, I want to thank Ranking Member Castor. We certainly want to thank all the witnesses for being here today and taking your time to spend with us.

Members may have additional written questions for you all. I will remind members they have 10 business days to submit additional questions for the record, and I ask that witnesses do their best to submit responses within 10 business days upon receipt of those questions.

I ask unanimous consent to insert in the record the documents included on the staff hearing documents list.

Without objection, so order.

[The information follows:]

******** COMMITTEE INSERT ********

Mr. Goldman. Without objection, the subcommittee is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 1:04 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]