

CHAIRMAN JOHN SHIMKUS' OPENING STATEMENT

Joint Hearing - Subcommittee on the Environment and Economy &
Subcommittee on Energy and Power

“Oversight of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission”

10:00 a.m., September 9, 2015

Thank you for attending this morning's hearing to discuss the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC). The NRC is responsible for licensing and regulation of our fleet of nuclear power plants, as well as management of nuclear materials which impact our lives daily. This is a critical responsibility and our Congressional oversight of the commission is vital.

My home state of Illinois generates the most nuclear energy in the country. However, the state's nuclear power generation faces strong economic challenges. With low cost natural gas and minimal growth in electricity demand, I am concerned the economic impact associated with an increasing price of regulatory compliance will disproportionately affect those economically distressed nuclear power plants.

The nuclear industry's cost of complying with regulatory action has doubled over the last ten years. The cost of compliance results from a layering of regulatory actions on nuclear power plants, which become more burdensome. I am pleased the NRC recognizes the need to consider the regulatory impact on licensees and minimize the cumulative effect of regulation.

I commend Chairman Burns for acknowledging this principle in a recent vote on containment protection rulemaking. Your vote to support the policy “most in line with the agency’s efforts to reduce the cumulative effects of regulation” in which “there is little to no additional safety benefit to be gained by proceeding” deserves recognition.

In addition to reducing the cumulative effects of regulation, the nuclear industry needs certainty in interacting with a reliable and efficient regulator. NRC must assure its actions are clearly justified and NRC staff follows established processes, which adhere to NRC’s Principles of Good Regulation. I look forward to hearing from the commission other proposals for NRC to improve the efficiency in which it functions as a regulator.

Used fuel management continues to remain a top priority for this committee. Proceeding with a permanent repository at Yucca Mountain maintains strong bipartisan support. I applaud NRC staff for recently releasing the draft supplemental environmental impact statement (SEIS) on potential groundwater impacts for Yucca Mountain. The draft SEIS again verifies the repository can safely operate for one million years and affirms the site is the best solution to permanently dispose of spent nuclear fuel. The Federal Government’s inability to fulfill its legal obligations established by the Nuclear Waste Policy Act continues to increase every year Yucca Mountain is delayed. The NRC and Department of Energy must resume consideration of the Yucca Mountain license application and reach a final decision whether the site, as science has indicated, can safely store spent nuclear fuel.

In upcoming months we will consider other important components of a used fuel management system. Issues such as transportation, benefits for host states and communities, the role of consolidated interim storage, and system budgeting and funding challenges should be thoughtfully examined to inform used fuel legislation.

I look forward to hearing from the commissioners today and thank you for your service.