Opening Statement of Chairman Greg Walden
Subcommittee on Environment Hearing on
"H.R. ___, the Nuclear Waste Policy Amendments Act of 2017"
April 26, 2017

Nuclear energy is and must remain a vital component of our nation's diverse, reliable, and clean electricity portfolio. Numerous companies are seeking to develop new nuclear technologies to power our nation's homes and factories for another generation.

Just this year, an Oregon-based nuclear technology company, NuScale, submitted a new design for a small modular reactor to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission for review and approval. This first-of-a-kind design could operate more efficiently than existing plants and would provide future optionality in design and construction for utilities to meet energy demand. However, while we look forward to advanced nuclear technology development, it is long overdue to solve our nation's nuclear waste disposal challenge.

35 years ago, Congress enacted the Nuclear Waste Policy Act into law. This law was the culmination of decades of experience by the federal government to develop a policy to dispose of high-level radioactive waste and commercial spent nuclear fuel permanently. Some of the material was created during the Manhattan Project and through the Cold War at the Hanford site, a vital national security facility located on the Columbia River about 40 miles north of my district. Today, after

years of cleanup activity and with more work remaining, this nuclear material still sits on a vibrant waterway waiting to be transported to the Yucca Mountain repository in the Nevada desert.

The Nuclear Waste Policy Act also established a fee tied to the generation of nuclear energy in order to finance the costs of a multi-generational disposal program. Along with 33 other states, Oregon ratepayers fulfilled their financial obligations under the law and paid the Department of Energy over $160 million to dispose of commercial spent nuclear fuel.

The Trojan nuclear power plant located in northwest Oregon stopped producing electricity in 1993, with the expectation that DOE would begin to remove the spent fuel in 1998, as was required by law. However, that never happened and since the plant's decommissioning activities were completed in 2007, only spent nuclear fuel remains stranded at the site, hampering any redevelopment efforts surrounding the site. This story is repeated across the nation, with states and communities waiting for DOE to fulfill its obligations and dispose of the spent fuel.

The federal government has recently been at an impasse in efforts to advance our nation's nuclear waste management program. The consequences of this impasse are significant and worsen our nation's fiscal health. The costs to the American taxpayer to pay for the federal

government's delay in opening the Yucca Mountain repository have nearly doubled to $30 billion since 2009 and that figure continues to escalate rapidly.

A thoughtful and deliberate legislative process produces good legislation. This subcommittee has received testimony from over 30 witnesses to develop and inform this discussion draft. Subcommittee Chairman Shimkus led a trip to the Yucca Mountain site with our colleagues to see firsthand the remote site adjacent to the isolated Nevada National Security Site. The committee also sent numerous oversight letters to the Department of Energy to seek information regarding approaches to managing our nation's nuclear waste and spent nuclear fuel. While the previous administration was kicking the can down the road and avoiding this difficult issue, we were working towards a solution.

The time to fix this problem is now and today's hearing on the discussion draft will initiate the process of receiving feedback from stakeholders on legislative language. I welcome the testimony this morning and look forward to providing a path forward to solve this significant national challenge.