

Statement of William D. Magwood, IV
Committee on Environment and Public Works
United States Senate

February 9, 2010

Chairman Boxer, Ranking Member Inhofe, and Members of the Committee, it is an honor to appear before you today as you consider my nomination to serve as a member of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC). I appreciate the time the members of this committee and your staffs have provided me in recent weeks as we have discussed my nomination and the very important issues that will face the Commission in the coming years.

Before I begin, I would like to recognize the impressive service of Edward McGaffigan, whose term I have been nominated to complete. Commissioner McGaffigan was a strong, independent voice on the NRC for more than 11 years. His commitment, passion, and intellect have set a very high standard for all public servants and, if confirmed, I will always view his example as one to which we should all aspire.

I appear before you today as the grandson of men who worked in the coal mines of West Virginia and the steel mills of Pittsburgh. My father worked for the Postal Service and, for many years, also held a night job to provide for our family. My mother was what they now call a “stay-at-home mom.” She was the lady in the neighborhood other kids came to when they needed help and their own mothers were not nearby. From her, I learned to do the right thing even when the right thing wasn’t easy. From my father I learned hard work and personal responsibility. More than anything else I say today, you should know that these are the values I offer to the position to which I’ve been nominated.

I am a product of the Pittsburgh Public School System, where I found the encouragement and support to graduate a year early to attend Carnegie-Mellon University. There, I earned my degree in Physics, and because I needed to feed the other side of my brain, I also earned a degree in English. I later earned a Master of Fine Arts degree from the University of Pittsburgh before going to work for Westinghouse Electric Corporation as a scientist in the area of nuclear and hazardous waste treatment and disposal. After several years with Westinghouse and later as a program manager at the Edison Electric Institute, I was honored to join the Department of Energy (DOE) as an appointee of President Bill Clinton’s White House. I was eventually appointed to lead the Department’s Office of Nuclear Energy, Science, and Technology, a position I held through President Clinton’s second term and President Bush’s first term.

I have spent about half of my professional career in public service. When I stepped down in May 2005, I was very proud of my organization's record of innovation, integrity, and accomplishment. We launched and conducted advanced technology research in many important areas; established an enduring international framework for multilateral research cooperation; established a new, civilian nuclear technology-focused national laboratory; and spurred a quadrupling of the number of students pursuing nuclear technology disciplines in universities and colleges across the country—including breakthrough programs at small, historically black institutions.

Perhaps the most important aspect of my responsibilities at DOE was the management and safety oversight of a large nuclear infrastructure that conducted advanced energy research, produced vital medical isotopes, and built advanced power systems for space exploration and national security applications. This infrastructure included two large research reactors, many hot cells, radioactive waste storage and disposal areas, and thousands of workers.

I was, in effect, the nuclear safety regulator for this infrastructure. As such, I saw it as my personal responsibility to set a very high standard for safety. No matter the cost or impact on programs, I would and did order “stand-downs” at DOE sites when I was not satisfied with levels of safety. In one case, safety considerations led me to terminate a long-standing program at one of DOE's sites. This decision was controversial, expensive, and disruptive, but I felt then and I feel today that nothing is more important than taking clear and responsible action in the face of any question of worker and public safety.

My past experience provides me a deep understanding of the management and operation of nuclear power plants, nuclear fuel facilities, medical and educational facilities, waste treatment and disposal facilities and many other areas for which the NRC must provide effective regulation. Because of my experience, I firmly believe that maintaining uncompromisingly high levels of safety is the first and most important job of any organization that handles nuclear materials. I look forward to bringing these high expectations to the work of the NRC.

Members of the Committee, I believe that public service is both a great honor and a great responsibility. If confirmed, it will be my purpose to fulfill my new mission with a singular focus on the interests of the American people, doing business in a manner that earns the public's trust, and always doing the right thing even when the right thing isn't easy.

Thank you for your time and attention. I look forward to answering any questions you may have.