

Statement of Jeff Baran
Committee on Environment and Public Works
May 10, 2023

Chairman Carper, Ranking Member Capito, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am honored to have been nominated to continue my service on the Nuclear Regulatory Commission for another term. Thank you, Congressman Beyer, for taking the time to introduce me. I appreciate it.

I have been reflecting on the changes in the nuclear energy landscape since I joined the Commission in 2014. A lot has changed. We have seen major shifts in NRC's workload, budget, staff size, hiring, and overall outlook for the future. When I arrived on the Commission, these factors were all on a downward slope. Our workload was shrinking. Our staff and budget were shrinking. We had the Project AIM effort to reduce costs, narrowly avoided layoffs, and essentially had a hiring freeze. Nuclear power plants were shutting down. Back then, there was little talk of new construction beyond Vogtle. There was some interest in small modular reactors, but almost no real discussion of advanced, non-light-water reactors.

Today, we are in a very different situation. Policymakers and the public are increasingly focused on climate change and on energy security. The urgency and scale of the climate challenge have led to a growing consensus that meeting ambitious climate goals will involve nuclear power, including new reactors. The bipartisan infrastructure legislation and the Inflation Reduction Act make large investments to drive this expansion, including through the Clean Electricity Production Tax Credit and funding for a domestic high-assay low enriched uranium supply chain. Few, if any, nuclear power plants are expected to close anytime soon. With more potential applications for advanced reactors, small modular reactors, subsequent license renewal, new fuel designs, power uprates, and risk-informed programs expected, NRC's overall workload is increasing. We are hiring again, and our budget requests are stabilizing, or even growing a bit, to allow us to do this new work. The outlook for nuclear has markedly changed, and it is an exciting time to be doing our important work.

NRC has a key role to play in addressing climate change and energy security. It's our job to ensure the safety and security of nuclear power in the U.S. energy mix. And that means we need to be ready. When utilities and vendors tell us that we should expect numerous new designs and reactor applications, we need to be ready with sufficient resources and the right expertise to review them, and an efficient and effective licensing process that can handle every application that comes our way. That's an important NRC

responsibility. In this period of change, NRC also needs to be open to – and ready for – new technologies that could improve safety.

When I arrived at NRC, I committed to bring an open-minded and collegial approach to the issues that come before the Commission. And I believe I have met that commitment. My focus has been on crafting thoughtful, balanced, and timely votes after hearing from a broad range of stakeholders. I value the relationships I have formed with my Commission colleagues, the NRC staff, licensees, unions, states, tribes, and public interest organizations, and have benefitted greatly from their ideas and input. My frequent visits to nuclear power plants and other NRC-regulated facilities not only give me an opportunity to view equipment and technologies firsthand; they also give me the chance to hear directly from NRC's resident inspectors, as well as the workers and managers at the sites, about their priorities and concerns. If confirmed, I look forward to maintaining my open-door approach.

Several key initiatives are underway at NRC, and I am eager to see them through to their conclusion. If I am confirmed for another term, I will continue to focus on these efforts, including establishing the framework for advanced reactors and small modular reactors, standing up the framework for fusion, and finalizing the decommissioning rulemaking and source security rulemaking. I also want to see the agency make real progress on our environmental justice efforts. Ensuring that the agency has the talented and engaged workforce to succeed is another top priority for me. I am happy to discuss these or any other issues of interest to members of the Committee in greater detail today or in the future.

Prior to my service on the Commission, I had the privilege of working for Congress for more than a decade. I have a deep respect for the importance and value of Congressional oversight. If confirmed, I will continue to do everything I can to ensure that the Committee has the information it needs to meet its oversight responsibilities.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.