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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6175

RICHARD M. RUSSELL, MAJORITY STAFF DIRECTOR
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June 25, 2019

Kristine L. Svinicki
Chairman
U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
11555 Rockville Pike
Rockville, Maryland 20852

Dear Chairman Svinicki:

We request you initiate a process to develop a Generic Environmental Impact Statement (GEIS) for the construction and operation of advanced nuclear reactors. A GEIS for advanced nuclear reactors will be a critical step to facilitate the deployment of new nuclear technologies.

Preserving and expanding the use of nuclear energy is crucial to address climate change. Advanced nuclear reactors can increase safety, reduce costs, and operate more efficiently compared to current nuclear power plant designs.

Congress has demonstrated bipartisan support for the development and deployment of advanced nuclear technologies. On January 14, 2019, President Trump signed the Nuclear Energy Innovation and Modernization Act (NEIMA) into law. NEIMA directs the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) to establish a technology-inclusive, regulatory framework for advanced nuclear reactors by December 31, 2027. A GEIS is another important action that aligns with NEIMA's advanced nuclear reactor requirements.

Developing a GEIS will reduce cumbersome regulatory barriers, expedite the environmental review process, and enable market deployment of innovative nuclear technologies. Accelerating the licensing and permitting of new nuclear facilities will encourage the marketplace to support these advanced technologies.

The NRC currently uses a GEIS for some licensing actions, such as renewing licenses for current operating nuclear reactors and onsite storage of spent nuclear fuel. Some issues associated with advanced nuclear reactor licensing are similar to areas which the NRC currently uses a GEIS.

Establishing a GEIS for advanced nuclear reactors will focus NRC's licensing efforts on the most important safety issues, reduce NRC staff resources dedicated to environmental permitting, and align with Congressional and Executive Branch efforts to conduct environmental permitting reviews more efficiently.¹

¹Executive Order 13807 and various laws, including the FAST Act (P.L. 114-94), focus on improving the environmental permitting process and coordinating environmental reviews to meet ambitious deadlines.


A GEIS for advanced reactors should:

- Acknowledge areas where common environmental impacts have already been effectively addressed in other elements of the NRC review;
- Acknowledge areas where issuance of other federal or state environmental permits can mitigate environmental impact;
- Credit designs that minimize environmental impact due to the production, design, and safety features of advanced reactors; and
- Allow unique design or site challenges to be addressed using Supplemental Environmental Impact Statements.


We support NRC's efforts to incorporate innovation as part of the agency's transformation initiative. A GEIS for advanced nuclear reactors will demonstrate NRC's commitment to transform and innovate.

Thank you for your consideration of our request. We look forward to continuing these discussions on how to efficiently license, regulate, and oversee the safe use of advanced nuclear technologies.

Sincerely,



John Barrasso, M.D.
Chairman
Committee on Environment and Public
Works



Mike Braun
Chairman
Subcommittee on Clean Air and Nuclear
Safety

CC:

The Honorable Jeff Baran
Commissioner, Nuclear Regulatory Commission

The Honorable Annie Caputo
Commissioner, Nuclear Regulatory Commission

The Honorable David A. Wright
Commissioner, Nuclear Regulatory Commission