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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6175

RICHARD M. RUSSELL, MAJORITY STAFF DIRECTOR
MARY FRANCES REPKO, MINORITY STAFF DIRECTOR

July 23, 2020

The Honorable Kristine Svinicki
Chairman
U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
11555 Rockville Pike
Rockville, MD 20852

Dear Chairman Svinicki,

We applaud the actions taken by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) to prepare an advanced reactor Generic Environmental Impact Statement (GEIS), as requested in our June 25, 2019 letter.¹ An advanced reactor GEIS will serve as a valuable tool for nuclear innovators to accelerate the deployment of clean and reliable advanced nuclear reactors.

Nuclear energy is a vital component of our nation's energy system. It is necessary for our clean energy future. Advanced reactors could enhance safety, improve performance, and increase operational flexibility to reduce carbon dioxide emissions. Scalable reactors could serve remote communities and other markets in need of reliable carbon-free electricity. Other advanced reactors could provide electricity and heat for non-electric applications, helping to ensure our environmental sustainability by reducing emissions from not only the electricity sector, but the transportation and industrial sectors as well.

As stated in our previous letter, an advanced reactor GEIS will expedite the environmental review process and enable market deployment of innovative nuclear technologies. Use of a GEIS for advanced nuclear reactors will improve efficiency by avoiding redundant review of common issues and impacts. It will increase predictability in the licensing process, which is extremely important for the sustainable development of this next-generation technology.

While we support the NRC staff's plan to develop a technology-neutral GEIS, we request the Commission develop a broader GEIS to increase predictability and opportunity to develop advanced nuclear technologies.

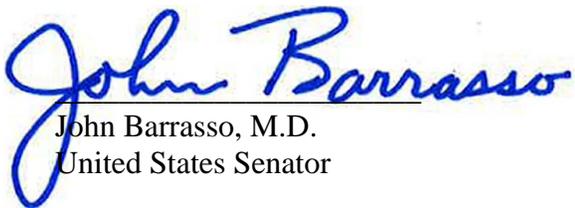
The proposed GEIS would only cover advanced nuclear reactors which generate small amounts of electricity. It would exclude light-water small modular reactors or larger non-water advanced reactors. This approach limits the usefulness of the GEIS. We encourage the development of a more inclusive GEIS. A GEIS based on risk would align with the Nuclear Energy Innovation and Modernization Act's (NEIMA) requirements to establish a technology-inclusive, risk-informed, and performance-based regulatory framework for advanced reactors.

¹ https://www.epw.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/e/a/ea93eb6e-eafe-4d22-aa4f-bd8ab15c9a34/01A9876345690E79F9EFDB6E83D37A5C.06.25.2019-svinicki-letter-re-geis-adv-nuclear.pdf

The Commission should also consider additional actions to improve the environmental permitting of advanced reactors. This could include assessing alternative site and need for power analyses, or incorporating existing environmental analyses into the NRC's review, to the extent practicable.

We appreciate the Commission's continued commitment to establishing a timely, effective, and efficient regulatory framework for advanced reactor applicants. We ask that your response detail how you plan to incorporate our requests into the advanced reactor GEIS.

Sincerely,


John Barrasso, M.D.
United States Senator


Mike Braun
United States Senator


Mike Crapo
United States Senator

CC:

The Honorable Jeff Baran
Commissioner, Nuclear Regulatory Commission

The Honorable Annie Caputo
Commissioner, Nuclear Regulatory Commission

The Honorable David Wright
Commissioner, Nuclear Regulatory Commission

The Honorable Christopher Hanson
Commissioner, Nuclear Regulatory Commission