Opening Statement of Ranking Member Whitehouse
Senate Environment and Public Works Committee Hearing: *Hearing on the Nominations of Usha-Maria Turner to be an Assistant Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency for the Office of International and Tribal Affairs and David A. Wright to be a Member of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission"*
June 25, 2025

Thank you both for being here today.

The United States is on the cusp of a domestic nuclear renaissance. We are seeing remarkable innovation in and appetite for nuclear power—and it's just in time. Nuclear is an important tool to cut emissions in the power and industrial sectors.

It's also key to meeting our nation's power needs safely. Demand for electricity is expected to increase more than 50 percent through 2050, and without alternative sources like nuclear, we will be unable to sustain our own economic growth.

Many of us in Congress have been working for years—on a bipartisan basis—to prepare the Nuclear Regulatory Commission for this moment. I have been the Democratic lead on the past three major bipartisan nuclear reform bills passed into law: from the Nuclear Energy Innovation Capabilities Act (NEICA) with Senator Crapo, to the Nuclear Energy Innovation and Modernization Act (NEIMA) with Senator Barrasso, and most recently the Accelerating Deployment of Versatile, Advanced Nuclear for Clean Energy (ADVANCE) Act with our Chair.

These laws well position the NRC for an era of renewed safe nuclear deployment.

This should be the backdrop for this re-nomination hearing. Unfortunately, this is not where we find ourselves.

Despite so much commonsense, bipartisan work, the Trump Administration has upended progress in a flamingly partisan manner. In this case, by DOGE-ing the NRC in flagrant disregard for nuclear safety, for the bipartisan direction of Congress, and for the law.

First came hyper-partisan attacks on independent regulatory agencies writ large.

Then came executive orders demanding redundant, unreasonable, or legally dubious changes to American nuclear licensing.

Then came DOGE staffers. Without any substantive experience, they barreled into the NRC and pushed out highly qualified, experienced, technical senior staff.

And then came the illegal and baseless firing of NRC Commissioner and former Chair Chris Hanson—the first removal of any NRC commissioner in its 50-year history.

The NRC is a pillar of America's nuclear renaissance. Anyone in the nuclear industry will tell you that safety and public trust are foundational to the continued safe operation of our existing nuclear fleet—let alone our overdue progress into new reactors and technologies.

To ensure that we can build and operate nuclear reactors safely while also powering our communities with clean, reliable electricity, Congress separated the regulatory entity, the NRC, from the technology promoter, the DOE. The separation ensures we can lead the world on nuclear innovation and maintain effective oversight.

The tumult at the NRC is not what members on either side of the aisle wanted. It has created chaos that will introduce unnecessary procedural roadblocks and slow down nuclear licensing. It will push out expert staff at a time when we need to retain all current talent *and* attract new expertise to oversee the deployment of next-generation nuclear technologies. It will add legal and regulatory uncertainty that will impede project development. And that's saying nothing of the myriad other ways that other cuts to IRA tax credits, DOE's Loan Programs Office, and other key programs will undermine nuclear deployment in America.

All that said, Chairman Wright, I support the President's re-nomination of you. You are a qualified nominee. I hope that you can address the current upheaval quickly and that you can actually lead the agency as chair.

Should you be confirmed, I ask that you commit to us—a bipartisan committee that will hold you to account— that you will do as the law provides: uphold NRC independence, adhere to its mission, and effectively, efficiently, and faithfully execute the laws passed by Congress.

As to Ms. Turner's nomination to lead the Office of International and Tribal Affairs at EPA.

Trump's EPA is a cesspool of fossil fuel-driven corruption, even weaponizing the justice system to serve the interests of the polluters.

We have reached the point where ***any*** nominee President Trump sends us should be treated with skepticism. This nominee has spent her entire career working for gas utilities and fossil fuel companies, including, most recently, Chesapeake Energy. Chesapeake Energy was one of only a handful invited to attend fossil fuel megadonor Harold Hamm's Mar-a-Lago fundraiser, at which President Trump promised a bunch of Big Oil executives *carte blanche* over environmental regulations in exchange for money for his campaign. The corruption and conflicts of interest are happening in plain view. For that reason, I will not support this nomination.