Opening Remarks of Ranking Member Whitehouse: *"Hearing on the Nominations of Lee Beaman to be a Member of the Board of Directors of the Tennessee Valley Authority and Douglas Weaver to be a Member of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission."*

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Weaver, you have been nominated to fill the last vacancy on the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. This seat had been occupied by former Commissioner Annie Caputo, who resigned in August. I cannot help but wonder if her decision was influenced by DOE and DOGE interference at NRC and the ensuing turmoil.

This is the third hearing for an NRC nominee this year—and the second hearing to fill an NRC slot that was prematurely vacated. I will repeat the warning that I relayed to Chairman Wright and now-Commissioner Nieh: The Trump administration's assault on NRC's independence threatens the stability and reputation of the agency—and that threatens the viability of the U.S. nuclear industry. The nuclear industry's success depends upon the credibility of its regulator. That credibility is clearly in jeopardy.

In March 1975, NRC's first chairman, Bill Anders, testified before the Senate Joint Committee on Atomic Energy that "public confidence will follow only if our performance both serves, and is perceived to serve the public interest, and is not prejudiced either for or against the industry we regulate."

Instead, DOE has intruded across the NRC's Congressionally-mandated separation from DOE, and DOGE has inserted at NRC ten unqualified "DOGE" staffers. In the name of "transformation," these DOGE-s have pushed out nuclear experts and directed the NRC to rip up and revise its regulations in a dangerously short timeframe. That supposed transformation has only sown turmoil.

It begs the question, who is behind the rush to a wholesale revision of its regulations within 9 months. Who benefits? NRC lost scores of senior executives and technical staffers who might have defended against mischief lurking in such a change, and the revision is being jammed through without transparency or consultation under the Trump OIRA's new black-box process, led by a so-called acting general counsel who lacks any nuclear energy experience.

Kneecapping the nation's safety regulator at a time of unprecedented interest in cutting-edge nuclear technologies is shortsighted and irresponsible, and begs the question again: what's behind this? Why is the Administration evading NRC's licensing process by rushing applications through DOE and DOD, without the expertise or capacity to handle such reviews.

If you think the answer is the nuclear industry, you're wrong. Industry will pay the price of regulatory uncertainty. Industry will pay the price of errors from rushed reviews. Industry will pay the price of undermined confidence in nuclear safety.

But we will all pay the price if something goes seriously wrong. We will all pay the price of losing out on a zero-emissions energy source while we face growing climate and energy crises.

Mr. Weaver, on paper you have the technical qualifications for the job. You served two decades at the NRC and worked in the nuclear industry. My question to you is whether you will have the courage to choose safety over pressure from DOE, DOGE or the administration.

Turning now to Mr. Beaman. The Trump administration violated decades of bipartisanship at the Tennessee Valley Authority, firing all 3 Democratic Board members. My Republican colleagues are evidently okay with that.

Mr. Beaman's qualifications are that he is a Trump loyalist and 2020 election denier. He even signed a letter urging state legislators to appoint fake electors to the Electoral College to overturn the election. He has a "Freedom Award" from the Koch-backed Americans for Prosperity, a battleship of the fossil-fuel influence armada. When the ask comes to raise customers' rates by backing away from clean energy, it's a safe bet whose back he'll have.

He's the landlord to multiple Republican Members of Congress at his Capitol Hill rowhome, and campaign treasurer for one, whose misrepresentations on financial disclosures and reports are pending review by the House Ethics Committee. The nonpartisan Office of Congressional Ethics (OCE) found evidence of wrongdoing, but despite OCE's recommendation to subpoena witnesses, the investigation has been stalled since another of Beaman's tenants, Mike Johnson, became Speaker of the House. We will see if my Republican colleagues are okay with that, too.

Bipartisanship at the TVA had been a bipartisan Senate thing, until the Senate rolled over for the corrupt Trump administration. Competence at the NRC had been a bipartisan Senate thing, until the Senate rolled over for DOE and DOGE interference, and whatever corrupt mess is behind that interference. In a normal Senate, it would be a Senate thing to hold the nomination of someone involved as campaign treasurer in a House Ethics investigation until the investigation was concluded.

I think voters just sent a pretty strong message about following Trump off the corruption cliff, and I hope Senators think twice about tearing down our own institution.