Opening Statement
The Honorable Bradley R. Crowell
Commissioner, U. S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Senate Environment and Public Works Committee
September 3, 2025

Good morning, Chairman Capito, Ranking Member Whitehouse, and members of the Committee. Thank you for holding this hearing at a critical time for the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) and for the safe operation and deployment of nuclear energy technologies. Today we find ourselves at a pivotal juncture; a juncture that will determine the future of commercial nuclear power not just in the United States, but around the world.

When I began my tenure on the Commission almost exactly three years ago today, I had growing confidence in our collective ability to position the United States as the world leader for deploying the next generation of advanced nuclear energy technologies, and to do so while maintaining our hard-earned, world-class reputation for nuclear safety. In many respects, my confidence was buoyed by the success of this Committee to build and sustain bipartisan support for both expanding the use of nuclear power *and* for needed NRC reform.

Indeed, this Committee, along with your colleagues in the House, harnessed the bipartisan momentum to pass essential legislation providing the NRC with both the policy direction needed and tools necessary to efficiently oversee the safe design and operation of the next generation of commercial nuclear power. Key legislation, including the 2019 Nuclear Energy Innovation and Modernization Act (NEIMA) and the 2024 ADVANCE Act, has helped accelerate our efforts, sharpening the NRC's focus and creating an overall platform for success.

I appreciate all that this Committee and the Congress have done to support our ongoing efforts and to further spur much needed change at the NRC. These changes will prepare the Agency to successfully manage the unprecedented workload on its doorstep. Or as Chairman Wright is fond of saying, help prepare us to "meet the moment."

Speaking of Chairman Wright, I appreciate his testimony highlighting many of the NRC's accomplishments since he was designated NRC Chair earlier this year. I would like to supplement his list with a few notable additions during the three years I have served on the Commission:

- Issued 5 licenses for new reactors, including the two new units at Plant Vogtle in Georgia.
- Renewed the licenses for 6 reactor sites, totaling 10 individual reactor units, for another 20 years of operation. Collectively, these 10 units represent 10GW of generating capacity staying on the grid.
- Established a more efficient, focused license renewal process in response to Commission direction. Further efficiencies are now also underway pursuant to direction in Executive Order 14300.
- In response to unexpected industry demand, the NRC quickly developed and put into use a viable new regulatory pathway to permit the restart of recently shutdown reactors.
- Streamlined the process for the Commission to conduct mandatory, uncontested hearings for all new reactor licenses as required by the Atomic Energy Act.
- Approved the use of new remediation technologies to help accelerate the clean-up of abandoned uranium mine wastes.
- Established a new regulatory structure to review license applications for emerging fusion energy technologies.
- Extended multiple reactor design certifications for 40 years, including for the AP1000

The NRC staff is also currently engaged on over 30 advanced reactor projects, ranging from pre-application meetings to actively reviewing fully submitted applications. This is a notable data point. The fact that the NRC is continuing to get things done is often lost amidst the attention on reform. But rest assured - we can, and we are, making progress on all fronts.

Meanwhile, in May, the Administration issued Executive Order 14300 focused on reforming the NRC. The Executive Order doubles down on much of the Agency's current work and related

reform efforts already underway. In this regard, the E.O. is a welcome expression of support for the integral role of the NRC in catalyzing the safe deployment of new and advanced nuclear energy systems. However, I also worry that select elements of this E.O. will be counterproductive to achieving the goals of the E.O. itself. And my concern is further compounded when considering E.O. 14300 in conjunction with other nuclear focused executive orders and various executive branch-wide civil service reform initiatives.

I am taking the opportunity today to point out these likely contradictions not to sow confusion, but because based on conversations I have had with members of this Committee, other Administration officials, and a wide range of stakeholders, I firmly believe we all share the same goals. Thus, we should be willing and able to work together to resolve any obvious hurdles that will undermine our collective efforts.

By far, my greatest concern is the current and future NRC workforce. The Agency has been directed to do more with less despite a growing workload and aggressive timeframes. This is an unsustainable dynamic. The ADVANCE Act provided tools to retain and grow our workforce, yet Executive Order 14300 calls for considering reductions in force. Such reductions would be on top of the historically high rate of attrition already happening this year in response, in part, to the Deferred Resignation Program and other efforts impacting federal employees.

As you saw on the chart from Senator Whitehouse, the NRC is not just losing technical experts essential to our safety mission, we have lost valuable senior executives for an unusual variety of reasons. These workforce challenges are further compounded by the government-wide hiring freeze, currently in place until mid-October, and potentially decreasing budgets. These conditions are not a recipe for success. I note the recent report from the Administration's Energy Dominance working group that speaks clearly to the importance of adequately staffing agencies, including the NRC, "to ensure that nuclear fuel and reactors can be developed, licensed, sited, funded, and exported."

The working group's report raised another caution that resonated with me, stating that "procedural successes will not be sufficient to secure nuclear energy dominance without

investor, customer, and public confidence in projects." One path to jeopardizing public confidence is to decrease transparency. This maxim is especially true for nuclear energy. A significant portion of the NRC reforms called for by both the Administration and Congress will involve rulemakings. As we make progress on regulatory reform and modernization at the NRC, we must also retain some ability to engage proactively and transparently with the regulated community and with all other stakeholders. Failure to do so risks undermining public trust and forfeiting the "social license" necessary to successfully expand nuclear power generation. Working together, I am confident we can find ways to incorporate meaningful public engagement without compromising the efficiency we all desire.

Finally, unnecessary disruption in the name of reform could counterbalance efficiencies gained and those still to be implemented. As one commentator aptly put it, "A regulatory whipsaw effect would strangle the nuclear renaissance." On this point, I again draw your attention to the Administration's Energy Dominance working group report: "While creating new [licensing and permitting] pathways is important, they must be compatible with existing processes to ensure that project developers have full access to markets, and that existing licensing work is not disrupted." At the NRC, these impacts can manifest as repeating work, needlessly cycling staff and the Commission, and ultimately making the staff's jobs more difficult, all of which is antithetical to staying focused, maximizing efficiency, making reasoned safety cases, retaining staff, and simply getting things done.

I have 665 days remaining in my current term, and I want to report many more accomplishments to you during that time. But I am deeply concerned about the paradoxes that I have flagged this morning. Yet our shared goals across the government for a stable, safe, and prosperous energy future give me optimism and measured confidence that we can stay on the right side of this slope and on the right side of history. Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.