Opening Statement of Ranking Member Whitehouse Senate Environment and Public Works Committee Hearing: "Oversight of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission." September 3, 2025

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Nuclear energy is one of the most powerful tools in our arsenal to meet rising power demand and address the climate crisis. It is our largest source of zero-carbon electricity. Novel advanced-reactor technologies are uniquely equipped to produce high-temperature heat for industrial applications and can use spent fuel to mitigate our nuclear waste problem. Dozens of new projects are being announced and moving forward. Through passage of our bipartisan ADVANCE Act last year, and prior bipartisan reforms, Congress equipped the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to usher in a nuclear revival.

Unfortunately, the Trump Administration is throwing unprecedented and dangerous obstacles into the nation's nuclear path, obstacles that threaten to derail our bipartisan progress, undermine the growing support for nuclear energy, and put the public at risk.

Some in the administration want to turn the NRC into a rubber stamp, using unaccountable and clueless DOGE staffers to restructure the agency and upend its rules. DOGE staffers with no background in nuclear energy are ousting nuclear experts at all levels of the agency and replacing them with under- or un-qualified staff, adding uncertainty and delay in nuclear regulation, and rerouting supposedly independent commission decisions through political operatives at the White House.

The industry stands or falls on the NRC's gold-standard reputation for nuclear safety. It's now in jeopardy.

Congress created the NRC to split the conflicting roles of the Atomic Energy Commission, whose encouragement of nuclear deployment came to overpower its

safety mandate. As the AEC's safety record lost it both public and industry confidence, Congress created the Nuclear Regulatory Commission as the safety regulator, leaving the Department of Energy as the nuclear promoter. This regulatory firewall rebuilt public trust and enabled the United States to safely develop and operate the world's largest and most effective nuclear fleet.

Department of Energy seeks territorial expansion; and Trump's DOGE-y boys seek, whatever —reviving past mistakes by eroding the NRC's independence and injecting political favoritism into its processes.

We see this interference in front of us today. Three well-regarded Commissioners sit here. There should be two more. Commissioner, previous Chairman, Chris Hanson was illegally fired by President Trump. Commissioner Annie Caputo had had enough.

We see this interference in NRC's senior leadership.

[hold up org chart poster]

In July, I showed this Committee how the NRC had already lost seven senior-level managers. Now, four others have departed or announced their departure.

It's not just the senior ranks. NRC reports that 143 people departed between January and June, yet it hired only one person in the second quarter of the year because of a federal hiring freeze. More than 100 other staffers took the deferred resignation offer and will depart by the end of the year. It's a bloodbath.

An industry built on 80-year investments with a zero-percent acceptable failure rate cannot withstand the loss of regulatory certainty and public trust, damaged by DOGE-boy neophytes out to "move fast and break things." What they'll break will be this industry.

An independent NRC with in-house technical expertise is the way to U.S. nuclear dominance. Chair Capito and I agree on this, and should the turmoil subside, I look forward to working with her, members of this committee, and the commissioners—including newly re-installed Chairman David Wright—to see the NRC keep delivering the full promise of nuclear energy.