Opening Statement of Ranking Member Whitehouse
Senate Environment and Public Works Committee Business Meeting
July 9, 2025

Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'll speak very briefly to Ms. Turner. This administration has turned EPA's mission from protecting public health and the environment to protecting the pockets of fossil fuel companies. Ms. Turner comes directly from a fossil fuel company that was central to a backroom deal at Mar-a-Lago between then-candidate Trump and major oil and gas companies—a deal now dictating the direction of EPA.

The fossil fuel industry and its minions at EPA are behaving particularly disrespectfully, so I will vote no and urge my colleagues to do the same.

As to Mr. Wright, at no point during the NRC's 50-year history has there been a greater need for leadership than today. I stand by my statement during his nomination hearing: Mr. Wright is qualified to serve on the Commission. He stood before our committee, however, not just as a nominee but as the leader of the Commission. While I had hoped to see Chairman Wright rise to the occasion, circumstances at the NRC continue to deteriorate. I cannot presently support his renomination. Let me say why, because I am inclined to vote for him and facilitate his confirmation.

Licensing the next generation of nuclear reactors requires capable, expert staff who understand and execute the agency's mission. The Chairman seems to understand this, saying to Chair Capito and me: "In senior agency leaders, I prioritize characteristics such as strong technical expertise, a commitment to safety, and the ability to inspire and motivate. I look for individuals who demonstrate an understanding of the nuclear regulatory field...".

Yet, these are the very staff being forced out of the agency.

I implored the Chair to "address the current upheaval quickly." Upheaval, however, continues – even since the nominations hearing.

I asked the Chairman to commit to "uphold NRC independence." He nodded he would.

But, I am increasingly concerned that he will not be able to do so.

In response to my Questions for the Record, the Chairman acknowledged there is a DOGE staffer at the agency. This individual sits in an office that reports directly to the Chairman, however, the staffer is "on detail from the Department of Energy, and as such, does not have an NRC supervisor."

The Chairman defines supervising as "holding the staff accountable for execution of the direction provided by [the Chairman] and those delegated authorities by law from the

Chairman." Who, then, supervises this staffer? Who holds this staffer to account? Is this staffer above the Chairman?

If there was any doubt before, let this make clear: there are rogue actors operating within the agency, and its independence is in jeopardy.

I do not say this lightly. I have long supported nuclear technology, even before many of my fellow Democrats. I have worked on a bipartisan basis, including with many of you on this committee, to grow the nuclear share of our energy mix.

The future of nuclear energy in this country requires a credible independent regulator. Efficiency is important but safety is paramount. Just one lapse would put our country at risk, unravel our years of bipartisan progress, and set nuclear backward.

Under the Trump administration, that unraveling is under way.

We must head this off now, before it is too late. Let us work *together* as we have before to ensure that the NRC delivers on its mission—prescribed to it by Congress—and ushers in a long-sought nuclear renaissance.

If we can turn the tide and shore back up the NRC's independence, I would be glad to reconsider my position on Mr. Wright's renomination.