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U.S. Senate Date: Wednesday, July 9, 2025

Committee on Environment
and Public Works

Washington, D.C.

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BUSINESS MEETING

Wednesday, July 9, 2025

United States Senate

Committee on Environment and Public Works

Washington, D.C.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 8:45 a.m. in room 562, Dirksen Senate Office Building, the Honorable Shelley Moore Capito [chairman of the committee] presiding.

Present: Senators Capito, Whitehouse, Cramer, Lummis, Curtis, Graham, Sullivan, Ricketts, Wicker, Boozman, Husted, Merkley, Kelly.

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE SHELLEY MOORE CAPITO, A UNITED STATES SENATOR FROM THE STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA

Senator Capito. Good morning. I am going to go ahead and call us to order while we fill out our dais here. There is a presence of a quorum, right? So we can begin our statements.

So, for the information of the members of the committee, Ranking Member Whitehouse and I will deliver opening statements, and then we will have sufficient attendance. I will stop so we can vote, and we will vote on the 32 GSA resolutions en bloc.

Following that vote, we will proceed to the votes, report out the nominations. After the roll call votes, members who wish to be recognized to speak on the nominations may do so.

So I want to thank everybody for attending today's business meeting to vote on the nominations of David Wright to be a member of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, and Usha Maria Turner to be EPA Assistant for the Office of International and Tribal Affairs. I will support both of these nominees this morning.

As our Nation's independent nuclear safety regulator, the NRC is critically important to our energy future. Congress directed the NRC to be more efficient, and we expect the NRC under the leadership and direction of the chair and the commission to accelerate this work. Through Chairman Wright's leadership, the NRC has taken some initial positive steps. The

commission updated its mission statement, reduced the time frame to approve new nuclear licenses, and is addressing unique regulatory challenges with new reactor designs.

I will work in a bipartisan manner to hold the commission, including Chairman Wright, accountable to expedite their efforts while maintaining their focus on ensuring nuclear safety.

In response to questions for the record I had submitted jointly with Ranking Member Whitehouse, Chairman Wright affirmed that he is committed to preserving the NRC's independent authority to license and oversee the civilian use of nuclear material. I appreciate that commitment, and will support his nomination.

I will also vote for Usha Maria Turner to lead the EPA's Office of International and Tribal Affairs. Her experience in energy and environmental regulatory affairs makes her well prepared to represent the EPA around the world and with our tribal partners.

I urge my colleagues to support these nominations. I also encourage my colleagues to support 32 GSA resolutions that authorize important repair and alteration projects and leases across the Country.

With that, I will turn to Ranking Member Whitehouse for his opening statement.

[The prepared statement of Senator Capito follows:]

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE SHELDON WHITEHOUSE, A UNITED STATES SENATOR FROM THE STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

Senator Whitehouse. Thank you, Madam Chair.

As to Ms. Turner, this Administration has turned EPA's mission from protecting public health and the environment to protecting the pockets and interests of fossil fuel companies. Ms. Turner comes directly from a fossil fuel company, one that was central to a back room deal at Mar-A-Lago between then-candidate Trump and major oil and gas companies, a deal now dictating the direction, or misdirection, of EPA.

The fossil fuel industry and its minions at EPA are behaving particularly disgracefully, and until that changes, I will vote no and urge my colleagues to do the same. Either way, I don't see any prospect of that changing.

As to Mr. Wright, at no point during the NRC's 50-year history has there been a greater need for leadership there than today. I stand by my statement during his nomination hearing; Mr. Wright is qualified to serve on the commission. He came before our committee, however, not just as a nominee, but as the present leader of the commission.

I hope to see Chairman Wright rise to the occasion, but circumstances right now 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

to 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 characterize 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. This is the toll on that agency already.

In the hearing, I implored the Chair to address the current upheaval quickly. Upheaval, however, continues now, even since the nominations hearing. I asked the chairman to commit to uphold the NRC independence. He nodded that he would. We saw that.

But what is happening right now makes me increasingly concerned that he simply will not execute on his statements. 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, and I quote the QFR from Mr. Wright, "The staffer is on detail from the Department of Energy and as such does not have an NRC supervisor."

How does that work, particularly if what we are seeing is a

Department of Energy hostile takeover of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to expand its scope?

The chairman defined supervising as "holding the staff accountable for execution of the direction provided by the chairman and those delegated authorities by law from the chairman." So who then supervises this DOGE staffer? Who holds this staffer to account? Is this staffer above the chairman?

If there was any doubt before, let's make this clear: there are rogue actors acting 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, yes. It is important. But safety is paramount. Just one lapse would put our Country at risk, unravel our years of bipartisan progress, and set nuclear power backward.

Under the Trump administration, that unraveling is happening. We must head this off now, as a committee, before it is too late. Let's 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 very glad to reconsider my present position on Mr. Wright's renomination. I very much want to get to yes. But the behavior that we are seeing at the NRC presently makes that impossible.

Thank you, Chairman.

[The prepared statement of Senator Whitehouse follows:]

Senator Capito. Thank you, Senator Whitehouse. We have had several conversations on this and we will continue to talk.

Senator Whitehouse. I appreciate your keen interest in it.

Senator Capito. Yes. Thank you.

We still need all of our attendance here on the Republican side, so we are going to go ahead and begin, we have agreed to consider the committee resolutions before we vote en bloc by voice votes.

So I move to consider 32 committee resolutions to approve prospectuses from the General Services Administration. Is there a second?

Senator Whitehouse. Second.

Senator Capito. All those in favor, say aye.

[Chorus of ayes.]

Senator Capito. All those opposed, no.

[No audible response.]

Senator Capito. In the opinion of the Chair, the ayes have it. With that, the resolutions are approved.

I will have to hold here for a few minutes while I check on the attendance.

[Pause.]

Senator Capito. They are all proverbial, they are all on their way.

Senator Whitehouse. That reminds me of a story on our side

of the aisle in the Senate, when Senator Ted Kennedy was needed for a vote, and the cloakroom called to say, we need you on this vote, where are you? And he said, I will be right there, I am at the airport.

[Laughter.]

Senator Whitehouse. What he didn't tell them was that he was at the Boston airport.

[Laughter.]

Senator Whitehouse. The moral of the story, never believe a Senator regarding their whereabouts.

Senator Capito. That is a good one.

Well, we have established that our esteemed colleague, Senator Lindsey Graham, has got the big seven oh today.

[Applause.]

Senator Graham. [Remarks off microphone.]

[Laughter.]

Senator Capito. So that makes your sign a what? What are you? A Leo?

Senator Graham. [Remarks off microphone.]

Senator Capito. There you are.

[Pause.]

Senator Capito. Well, I know Senator Wicker has a big markup today in committee, so we will try to scoot along here for you.

So now I am hearing they are close. Is that another one, the D.C. Airport.

[Laughter.]

Senator Capito. All right, we have full attendance here, and I think I can now call up Presidential Nomination 55-46, Usha Maria Turner of Oklahoma to be Assistant Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency. I move to approve and report the nomination favorably. Is there a second?

Senator Cramer. Second.

Senator Capito. Thank you very much. The Clerk will call the roll.

The Clerk. Ms. Alsobrooks?

Senator Whitehouse. No, by proxy.

The Clerk. Ms. Blunt Rochester?

Senator Whitehouse. No, by proxy.

The Clerk. Mr. Boozman?

Senator Boozman. Yes.

The Clerk. Mr. Cramer?

Senator Cramer. Aye.

The Clerk. Mr. Curtis?

Senator Curtis. Aye.

The Clerk. Mr. Graham?

Senator Graham. Aye.

The Clerk. Mr. Husted?

Senator Husted. Aye.

The Clerk. Mr. Kelly?

Senator Kelly. No.

The Clerk. Ms. Lummis?

Senator Lummis. Aye.

The Clerk. Mr. Markey?

Senator Whitehouse. No, by proxy.

The Clerk. Mr. Merkley?

Senator Merkley. No.

The Clerk. Mr. Padilla?

Senator Whitehouse. No, by proxy.

The Clerk. Mr. Ricketts?

Senator Ricketts. Aye.

The Clerk. Mr. Sanders?

Senator Whitehouse. No, by proxy.

The Clerk. Mr. Schiff?

Senator Whitehouse. No, by proxy.

The Clerk. Mr. Sullivan?

Senator Sullivan. Aye.

The Clerk. Mr. Whitehouse?

Senator Whitehouse. No.

The Clerk. Mr. Wicker?

Senator Wicker. Yes.

The Clerk. Madam Chairman?

Senator Capito. Yes.

The Clerk. Madam Chairman, the yeas are 10 and the nays are 9.

Senator Capito. With that, the nomination will be favorably reported and I appreciate that.

I would note that Steve retired, who has been doing our roll call votes for many years, as long as I have been on the committee. We have Karly here, taking on that role. So thank you, Karly, for doing that.

[Applause.]

Senator Capito. Finally, I call up Presidential Nomination 345-20, David Wright of South Carolina to be a member of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. I move to approve and report the nomination favorably. Is there a second?

Senator Cramer. Second.

Senator Capito. The Clerk will call the roll.

The Clerk. Ms. Alsobrooks?

Senator Whitehouse. No, by proxy.

The Clerk. Ms. Blunt Rochester?

Senator Whitehouse. No, by proxy.

The Clerk. Mr. Boozman?

Senator Boozman. Yes.

The Clerk. Mr. Cramer?

Senator Cramer. Aye.

The Clerk. Mr. Curtis?

Senator Curtis. Aye.

The Clerk. Mr. Graham?

Senator Graham. Aye.

The Clerk. Mr. Husted?

Senator Husted. Aye.

The Clerk. Mr. Kelly?

Senator Kelly. No.

The Clerk. Ms. Lummis?

Senator Lummis. Aye.

The Clerk. Mr. Markey?

Senator Whitehouse. No, by proxy.

The Clerk. Mr. Merkley?

Senator Merkley. No.

The Clerk. Mr. Padilla?

Senator Whitehouse. No, by proxy.

The Clerk. Mr. Ricketts?

Senator Ricketts. Aye.

The Clerk. Mr. Sanders?

Senator Whitehouse. No, by proxy.

The Clerk. Mr. Schiff?

Senator Whitehouse. No, by proxy.

The Clerk. Mr. Sullivan?

Senator Sullivan. Aye.

The Clerk. Mr. Whitehouse?

Senator Whitehouse. No for now.

The Clerk. Mr. Wicker?

Senator Wicker. Yes.

The Clerk. Madam Chairman?

Senator Capito. Yea, and the Clerk will report the yeas and nays.

The Clerk. Madam Chairman, the yeas are 10 and the nays are 9.

Senator Capito. With that, the nominee is favorably reported. Thanks again for everybody's patience; for everybody coming.

Senator Graham. [Remarks off microphone.]

Senator Capito. Well, if you had been here at the click of the gavel, you would know.

[Laughter.]

Senator Whitehouse. You want to show up on time, and we will show you how.

[Laughter.]

Senator Whitehouse. I will be glad to talk to you about that. That is nonsense that the NRC has to stop before I can support this guy. There is too much DOGE mischief going on, there is too much damage to the internal integrity of the NRC. It looks like a hostile takeover by the Department of Energy.

And it just isn't working. It is too important.

I put up a graphic that showed the number of staff who have already been shoved out the door. These are very senior career technical people who know their stuff.

So between the brain drain and the loss of independence and the attempt to infiltrate by people who clearly don't know what they are talking about into senior positions, it all looks bad right now. That needs to turn around, and I am working with the Chairman to try to see what we can do to try to resolve that.

I think we all believe here on this committee on a bipartisan basis in an independent and competent Nuclear Regulatory Commission that can move nuclear projects forward rapidly.

Senator Capito. Thank you. Does anybody wish to speak? With that, the business meeting is adjourned. Thank you all very much.

[Whereupon, at 9:00 a.m., the business meet was adjourned.]