

TESTIMONY OF

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For A Hearing

BEFORE

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Committee On Environment And Public Works

ON

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Commissioner Bradley R. Crowell
Senate Environment and Public Works Committee
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Chairman Capito, Ranking Member Whitehouse, and members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me and my fellow Commissioners to appear before you today to discuss the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's Fiscal Year 2027 budget request. Today, we find ourselves at a pivotal juncture that will determine the future of commercial nuclear power not just in the United States, but around the world.

Upon joining the Commission in mid-2022, I was excited to get to work and help lead an ongoing transformation at the NRC commensurate with my growing confidence in our country's collective ability to position the U. S. as the world leader for the next generation of nuclear energy technologies. But most importantly, to do so while maintaining the United States' hard-earned, world-class reputation for nuclear safety and security.

I am proud to have helped facilitate many accomplishments and milestones achieved by agency staff in just the last few years. Chairman Nieh highlighted many of the NRC's most recent successes in his remarks, and I share his optimism that we are building a framework to accelerate further achievements. However, success is far from guaranteed. Continued U.S. leadership in nuclear energy generation must always be grounded in a steadfast commitment to nuclear safety and security.

As we look ahead, my confidence in our nuclear future is buoyed by Congress building and sustaining bipartisan support for nuclear power as an indispensable contributor to our nation's energy needs. And in doing so, giving the NRC the policy direction and resources needed to modernize its approach to responsible nuclear regulation and oversight without sacrificing safety or security. I appreciate current and past members of this Committee for directing needed reforms at the NRC, including through the 2019 Nuclear Energy Innovation and Modernization Act (NEIMA) and the 2024 ADVANCE Act. These bipartisan legislative accomplishments provide the policy support necessary to accelerate the NRC's ongoing efforts to modernize its regulatory approach and sharpen the agency's focus to establish a refreshed platform for success.

A key tipping point in the positive changes underway at the NRC can be traced directly to the agency's recent update of its mission statement to establish a more "enabling" culture throughout the NRC without losing focus on safety and security. By effectively establishing an "enabling mindset" among agency staff, we have already seen notable improvements in both the efficiency and clarity of agency licensing and oversight activities. I hope this agency culture change will persevere despite recent upheavals among NRC staff. In the past 16 months, we have lost 510 employees, including a number of senior executives and subject matter experts, while bringing on only 59 new staff.

Almost one year ago, the current Administration issued Executive Order (E. O.) 14300, "Ordering the Reform of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission." The thrust of this E.O. doubles down on much of the agency's ongoing work and related reform efforts. Viewed positively, the E. O. is welcome recognition of the integral role the NRC can play in catalyzing the safe and secure deployment of new and advanced nuclear energy systems. However, the breadth and scope of this Executive Order combined with the extraordinarily short timelines it establishes for implementation risks undermining the very goals set by the E.O. itself. Maintaining the American public's trust in our government's ability to safely and securely regulate nuclear power generation, means that getting it right must be paramount versus moving quickly in pursuit of artificial timelines. The oft repeated mantra for fostering rapid advancements in many cutting-

edge technology sectors is to “move fast and break things.” While that ethos may apply well in some technology sectors, it is the antithesis of safe, secure, and informed nuclear regulation.

The legitimate need to enhance regulatory efficiencies without impacting safety is why my greatest concerns as a Commissioner today all relate to the current and future NRC workforce. The agency is being directed to do more with less despite a growing workload and aggressive new timeframes for agency licensing and oversight activities. This is an unsustainable dynamic. The NRC staff is the key to successfully turning our present-day challenges into future successes. They are undoubtedly our most vital asset. We **must do better** to retain and recruit talented staff.

In my role as an NRC Commissioner, I am often asked what keeps me awake at night. Lately, my most frequent response is questioning whether we are doing enough to support and supplement our staff and ensure that the NRC workforce is sufficiently robust and resourced to match the anticipated workload coming before the agency without sacrificing our commitment and attention to safety and security.

My second greatest concern for FY 2027 is the agency’s continued ability to execute on the NRC’s full mission, including the oversight of our nation’s current fleet of nuclear power reactors and fuel cycle facilities. While I wholeheartedly support the need to incorporate new efficiencies into all processes throughout the agency, we must not let the fervor of deregulation and a singular focus on operational efficiencies undermine the NRC’s critical role in ensuring the continued safe and secure operation of existing NRC licensed facilities. For example, I am concerned that shifting the agency’s focus to licensing activities too heavily or too quickly will come at the expense of maintaining sufficient talent and resources focused on our equally important oversight responsibilities. Weakening proven and successful oversight programs represents the greatest risk to realizing the true and lasting nuclear renaissance we are all working so hard to foster.

For lasting success, the NRC must double down on efforts to restore, build, and maintain public trust. I am concerned on this front because the surest way to undermine the public’s confidence in nuclear safety and, in the NRC’s role as safety regulator, is to decrease transparency. This maxim is true for all things nuclear – but is particularly acute with respect to nuclear power generation and used fuel management. Over the past year, circumstances have clouded stakeholder belief in the agency’s commitment to transparency as a pillar of the NRC’s Principles of Good Regulation. The agency’s ability to seek and receive valuable input from external experts, non-governmental agencies, trade associations, members of the public, and other key stakeholders has fallen victim to meeting arbitrary deadlines associated with E.O. 14300’s direction to overhaul the NRC’s entire regulatory framework. The durability of this herculean rulemaking effort would be greatly enhanced by allowing sufficient time for agency stakeholders to review and offer informed input on the unprecedented volume of proposed rulemakings being advanced under E.O. 14300. Instead, the agency has denied multiple well-justified requests to extend public comment periods by just a few weeks.

That said, while maintaining a credible opportunity for public comment is integral to a durable rulemaking process, it is not a substitute for the more fulsome, meaningful engagement with stakeholders, as rightfully expected by the public from any public-facing government agency. To foster a lasting nuclear renaissance, we must retain a reasonable ability to engage proactively and transparently with regulated entities, states, local communities, and all other stakeholders. Failure to do so risks undermining public trust and forfeiting the “social license” essential to an enduring future for nuclear technologies. During my remaining time on the Commission, I will continue to seek new ways for agency staff to conduct meaningful public engagement without compromising the efficiency we all desire.

Lastly, I presently see in the current cadre of NRC Commissioners a set of leaders with diverse skill sets and unique perspectives that constitute the right mix, at the right time, to effectively lead the NRC at this crucial juncture. We each understand and appreciate the necessity and value of working as a collegial, policy-making body. But this does not mean always agreeing. It means communicating regularly and honestly, and working together toward the best outcomes, with clear direction and durable decisions for the agency. As Commissioners, we owe this to the NRC workforce, the regulated community, and the American people.

With adequate resources for the agency and with clear, consistent leadership, I believe the NRC can achieve many great things. I intend to do my part to ensure we meet our responsibilities to the NRC workforce, and our obligations to the American public for whom we serve. While I have concerns, my belief in our shared goals across government, with support from both sides of the aisle, fuels my continued optimism and measured confidence that we can stay on the high end of this slippery slope and thus on the right side of history. Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.