Opening Remarks of Ranking Member Whitehouse: *"The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission's Proposed Fiscal Year 2027 Budget."*

Thank you, Madam Chair.

2026 has already been a busy year for the NRC. NRC issued its first commercial construction permit in nearly a decade and first commercial non-light water reactor permit in over 40 years, for TerraPower's advanced reactor—months ahead of schedule. It issued its first new fuel fabrication licenses in over 50 years, to TRISO-X to produce high-assay low-enriched uranium for America's future advanced reactor fleet. It completed its fastest-ever license renewal approval, in under 12 months, for the H.B Robinson plant in South Carolina. It finalized the "Part 53" risk-informed, technology-inclusive reactor licensing pathway to accommodate diverse advanced reactor technologies, and proposed regulatory frameworks for microreactors and fusion machines, as directed by Congress. NRC is showing that it can get the job done.

These accomplishments are the result of our actions in Congress, of prepared and engaged project applicants, and of the Commission itself, including its seasoned, expert staff. The narrative that NRC is the problem is the domain of unqualified developers seeking short cuts. These developers look to DOE to either take over or supplant our nation's safety regulator. As TerraPower's CEO said: "The regulator was a concern four, five plus years ago, but we started seeing progress... beginning that far back. The NRC is no longer the big concern." TerraPower's press release, which I will enter into the record, makes clear that capable applicants can navigate the licensing process smoothly. Working with NRC will bring this nation where it needs to go.

Unfortunately, threats to NRC's success – and success of the nuclear industry – still loom.

First, NRC's independence. Public trust in nuclear safety requires an independent regulator. From DOGE infiltration, to haphazard executive orders, to the firing without cause of a commissioner, the Trump Administration has reached unprecedented political tentacles into the NRC. Luckily, some of this turbulence has subsided—as evidenced by the full Commission seated before us today, whose combined experience and expertise will allow the NRC to function at its best. But White House and DOE operatives lurk at NRC, with a subset of these nuclear neophytes forming a shadowy "steering committee" to shape priorities at the agency. Meanwhile, DOE forges ahead, hastily approving reactors with the explicit goal of "fast tracking" them for future NRC licenses, as stated in DOE's own documents. Decades ago, Congress put a firewall between nuclear regulation and nuclear promotion, to protect the safe operation of our reactor fleet. These moves threaten that bulwark of nuclear safety. All this

while the proposed budget for NRC's Inspector General is cut by nearly a quarter—begging the question whether mischief at the agency will be caught before it's too late.

Second, NRC's transparency and deliberative process. The agency is churning through over two dozen rules in a wholesale revision of its regulations. Instead of robust stakeholder consultation, NRC rules move darkly through OIRA, where the White House, political players, and other agencies can quietly influence NRC's previously-independent rules. Even commissioners' votes on rulemakings, crucial windows into NRC's evaluative process, are no longer public. Even if no hidden mischief occurs, the lack of transparency reduces confidence and trust.

Third, and finally, NRC's workforce. Attrition at NRC remains at alarming highs, while the agency is taking on more work than ever. These staffing losses are unsustainable—and will undermine the nuclear renaissance this Administration claims it wants to bring to fruition.

Chair Capito and I, along with many of our colleagues, have spent years passing NRC reforms to effectively deliver on the promise of nuclear energy. Those reforms coincide with the regulatory renaissance TerraPower described. The results are clear: we see before us a Commission guided by strong group of capable leaders. At all costs we must not let creeping political influence compromise the NRC as it ushers in a new day for nuclear energy in America.