

Committee on Energy and Commerce

**Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr.**

Hearing on “American Nuclear Energy Expansion: Powering a Clean and Secure Future”

April 18, 2023

Thank you, Chairman Duncan, for holding today’s hearing. I hope that today is a sign that we can work in a bipartisan manner on energy issues.

Last Congress, this Subcommittee spent a lot of time studying the power sector and our nation’s electricity grid – and how they impact the worsening climate crisis. While the power sector has made significant progress in reducing carbon emissions over the last two decades thanks in large part to the growth of renewable energy, it still accounted for 28 percent of the total carbon pollution in the United States in 2022. So, decarbonizing the power plants that keep the lights on in our homes and businesses is crucial to addressing the climate crisis.

Nuclear power plays an important role in producing carbon-free power for the electric grid. Last year, nuclear power accounted for nearly half of all carbon-free power generated in the United States. In my home state of New Jersey, it supplies nearly 90 percent of the state’s carbon-free power.

Committee Democrats have long been committed to decarbonizing the power sector to combat the climate crisis and to lead the world in the clean energy transition. In order to achieve 100 percent decarbonization in the power sector while keeping prices low for consumers, we need reliable, carbon-free resources that can sustain output for long periods of time. Nuclear power can meet this test.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) has done an admirable job over the years ensuring nuclear power is safe and secure. The nuclear industry often touts its safety successes over the past decades, but that success is partly due to the efforts of federal regulators to stay on top of inspections and safety protocols at plants across the country.

Last week, I joined Chairs Rodgers and Duncan, and Ranking Member DeGette in a “Request for Information,” asking nuclear power stakeholders for comments and recommendations on the NRC licensing and regulatory process.

It’s important the Committee hear from all interested stakeholders about any possible regulatory improvements that could make the process more efficient or to improve safety and security. As we explore any possible changes, first and foremost, it is critical that they do not undermine the safety and security of our nation’s nuclear fleet.

As we look at the licensing and regulatory process, I also want to take a moment to highlight the investments that Democrats and President Biden have made over the last two years in our nation's nuclear power industry.

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law authorized the Civil Nuclear Credit Program, a \$6 billion fund at the Department of Energy to support our existing reactor fleet. These investments will help support continued operation of nuclear facilities to prevent increases in carbon pollution from the power sector.

Then, as part of the Inflation Reduction Act, we created a tax credit for zero-emission nuclear power and invested \$700 million in a program – originally established by this Committee in the Energy Act of 2020 – to support next generation nuclear fuel. The Inflation Reduction Act was the single largest investment in climate action in American history. It is going to finally allow us to begin to protect our communities from the impacts of the worsening climate crisis, while also creating new clean energy jobs and lowering energy costs for American families.

I would like to see this Committee work together to build on the progress we made during the last Congress. That's why I appreciate the bipartisan nature of this hearing today and hope that we will see more hearings where both sides of the aisle can work together. I yield back the balance of my time.