

Committee on Energy and Commerce

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

Hearing on “American Nuclear Energy Expansion: Spent Fuel Policy and Innovation”

April 10, 2024

It has now been nearly 70 years since the emergence of civilian nuclear energy in the United States, and yet we still have not found a workable solution to address the storage and disposition of spent nuclear fuel. The Nuclear Waste Policy Act set a goal of setting up a permanent repository to accept spent fuel by no later than 1998. Twenty-six years later, we are no closer to finding a solution to this problem.

And that’s unfortunate because the magnitude of the problem only continues to increase. American nuclear reactors have created nearly 90,000 metric tons of spent fuel that must be stored. Right now, this fuel is being stored on-site at nuclear facilities across the nation where it was once used to generate power. It’s even at locations that no longer have an operating nuclear reactor, including at the Oyster Creek site in New Jersey. The lack of progress on spent fuel is particularly difficult for these communities since they cannot complete decommissioning or start redevelopment of a former reactor site until the fuel can be relocated.

The federal government has a responsibility and an obligation to the more than 70 communities that currently are home to spent fuel throughout the nation. It is critical that we find a solution that does not abandon these communities and that does not continue to come at a steep price to American taxpayers. The Government Accountability Office projects that taxpayer liability relating to spent fuel will exceed \$60 billion by 2030.

We have a duty – both to nuclear communities and to all taxpayers – to find a solution that allows us to move this spent fuel as soon as we can. This Committee has a history of bipartisan work on this issue. In 2018, we worked together to find a bipartisan path forward by passing the Nuclear Waste Policy Amendments Act, led by former Committee members John Shimkus and Jerry McNerney. Building on that progress, I hope we can develop new bipartisan solutions to this long intractable issue.

The Biden Administration has recognized the urgent need for action and has responded to the call. It has continued building towards a consent-based interim storage siting process. Just last year, the Department of Energy made \$26 million worth of awards to a dozen different consortia to explore a community- and consent-based approach to siting facilities to store and dispose of spent fuel. These efforts will help us find a path forward that is legally and politically durable – just what communities across the nation need. I believe that Congress must support the Biden Administration’s effort here. It is a small step forward, but it represents the most concrete progress towards a solution for spent fuel that we’ve made in the last 15 years.

And while most of the debate recently has focused on what to do with existing spent fuel, as we move to more advanced reactors that demand advanced, higher-enriched fuels, the spent fuel issues will change. While some advanced reactor designs tout innovative ways to limit the amount of spent fuel they produce, we still must take these technologies into account as we develop solutions to responsibly store this material in the decades to come.

April 10, 2024
Page 2

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses about how we can find a durable pathway forward that works for communities, ratepayers, and all Americans. And now, I would like to yield the remainder of time to Representative Matsui.