

**Committee on Energy and Commerce**

**Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery  
of**

**Subcommittee on Energy Ranking Member Kathy Castor**

***Hearing on “Nuclear Spent Fuel Policy: Examining Nuclear Lifecycle Innovation Campuses”***

**September 15, 2026**

Today’s hearing addresses an important, bipartisan topic – how we deal with issues of spent nuclear fuel. When we passed the ADVANCE Act last Congress, we recognized that the Department of Energy must do more to safely manage, recycle, and store this fuel, particularly as we work to revitalize American’s nuclear energy industry.

However, I’m also frustrated that this will be the only hearing this subcommittee holds for six months. This subcommittee last had a hearing in June, and after this week, won’t meet again until at least November. That’s one hearing in 21 weeks – while we know there are so many challenges and a high cost of living that our neighbors back home need us to address.

The average household in the United States has had to pay an additional \$3,800 due to rising costs under Republican leadership. Thanks to the President’s reckless war in Iran, the average family back home in Tampa Bay has paid an additional \$471 for gas. Farmers are facing diesel prices above \$6 per gallon, on top of increased costs for inputs like fertilizer – right as we enter harvest season.

Electricity bills are increasing too – up 15 percent in the last 18 months. And that’s before utilities requested even more rate increases to fund at least \$1.4 trillion in capital expenditures by 2030 – largely driven by demands from AI data centers and rising costs thanks to President Trump’s tariffs.

This Committee should be working to address these issues. We need to advance bipartisan permitting reform – particularly to plan, permit, and pay for the transmission needed to build a 21st century electric grid.

If we’re serious about scaling all forms of energy, including nuclear, and connecting large loads like data centers to the grid, then we need to reform our broken interconnection queues.

Nuclear energy is important, but the President’s own Energy Information Administration has told us what energy is coming online this year – 86 GW of generation, made up of 51% solar, 28% batteries, 14% wind, and 7% gas. Unfortunately, the Administration’s policies are

making it harder for those many of those resources, meaning prices will just keep going up for hardworking Americans.

I know these are challenging issues – but Republicans on this Committee can't keep running away from them. Now, under this Administration, the Department of Energy has taken some creative approaches to dealing with the challenge of nuclear waste. In July, DOE announced it had signed MOUs with five states interested in hosting Nuclear Lifecycle Innovation Campuses, and a sixth state signed on just last week.

The United States has more than 90,000 metric tons of spent fuel – some of which could be recycled to produce power again, as has been done in other countries. While this progress is notable, I am concerned that it may come at the expense of proper safety and environmental guardrails. Let me be clear – any efforts to find new sites for long-term nuclear waste disposal requires Congressional approval.

I worry that the Administration is also ill-equipped to carry out this work after DOGE forced out experts across DOE, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, and the Environmental Protection Agency. Last year, President Trump illegally fired NRC Commissioner Hanson, and then dismissed seven of the eight members of the Nuclear Waste Technical Review Board, which is supposed to provide independent oversight.

We are responsible for protecting our communities that host nuclear plants and spent fuel – like Citrus County in Florida, about 90 miles north of Tampa Bay, which began retiring its Crystal River nuclear plant in 2013 following safety concerns about its containment facilities. When nuclear projects are not properly maintained, retired, and cleaned up, those costs are often paid by ordinary families in the form of higher electric bills. That's unacceptable - these communities are counting on us to keep them safe and make life more affordable.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today so this Committee can conduct better oversight of the Administration's progress and chart a path forward that protects our neighbors back home while advancing American leadership in nuclear energy.

I yield back.