

Committee on Energy and Commerce

Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery

of

Full Committee Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr.

Hearing on “American Energy Dominance: Dawn of the New Nuclear Era”

January 7, 2026

The last year has been one of the worst years for the security and safety of America’s civilian nuclear fleet since the splitting of the atom in 1945. Sounds dramatic, but it’s true. President Trump and Energy Secretary Chris Wright have attacked our nuclear regulatory regime, and shattered confidence in America’s hard-won record on nuclear safety. If the Trump Administration does not stop its attacks, American lives will be at risk.

I support safe nuclear energy. It’s clean, runs around the clock, and provides much-needed energy security. Democrats and Republicans on this Committee worked together last Congress to enact important nuclear energy laws, including the ADVANCE Act, a ban on importing Russian uranium, and investment in domestic nuclear fuel cycle buildout. But nuclear power also needs safeguards so the American people can have confidence that it will operate safely.

Based on the Trump Administration’s actions over the last year, I am deeply concerned that it is putting American lives at risk. Let’s recap what has happened this past year. President Trump, illegally fired, without cause, the former Chair of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) – for the first time in its 50-year history. A Republican NRC commissioner resigned out of disgust for what the commission had become. Two current NRC commissioners have warned that they could be fired at any time, for any reason, if they refused to approve a nuclear reactor due to safety concerns.

Any one of those events is cause for major concern, but all three of those events happening within the same year is a crisis.

And unfortunately, that’s not all. The Trump Administration issued an executive order demanding that all rulemakings from the NRC pass through the White House’s Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs for approval, putting Trump’s hand-picked lackies over independent commissioners confirmed by the United States Senate. This requirement has shattered the transparency that historically has given the American people assurance that the NRC’s rules are strong and effective. Instead, NRC commissioners are prevented from making public what they’re voting on until the White House has approved it. That is not how an independent agency should work.

And it gets even worse. Last year, employees affiliated with Elon Musk’s DOGE were detailed to the NRC from the Department of Energy. They informed the NRC’s Chairman and staff that they were expected to quote, “rubber stamp” reactor designs approved by the Department of Energy or the Department of Defense. They pushed out the NRC’s Executive Director for Operations and General Counsel. And, worst of all, they seem to operate without any NRC employees as their supervisors, and report directly back to the Department of Energy.

I shouldn’t have to tell anyone in this room that this is wildly illegal. Fifty years ago, when Congress created the NRC, it explicitly chose to separate it from what would become the Department of Energy. It is crucial that we fully separate the people responsible for aiding and assisting the nuclear

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industry – an important job – from the people in charge of regulating its safety. And yet, Secretary Wright has had no problem recklessly charging ahead.

We have repeatedly asked Secretary Wright for information, including when he was before us last year, but despite his promises then, we have received *nothing* from DOE. According to the White House, DOE is supposed to stand up three new nuclear reactors by July 4th of this year. But they have refused to share any information with us.

I understand the Trump Administration wants to promote nuclear energy, but I have zero confidence that it knows how to do it while maintaining the safety of the American people. We cannot afford a single mistake, and the Trump Administration is pushing us down a path where mistakes – potentially fatal ones – are becoming increasingly likely.

If Republicans have any interest in moving nuclear legislation this Congress, Democrats must have full and complete confidence in the safety of our nuclear fleet. Right now, we simply do not have that. The Trump Administration must stop its attacks on the independence of the NRC and genuinely engage with Congressional oversight if any progress is to be made. Democrats will not stand for this Administration putting American lives at risk.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I yield back.