

**Committee on Energy and Commerce**

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

***Hearing on "Nuclear Permitting Reform: Legislation to Advance Efficient Licensing"***

**June 9, 2026**

This is our third hearing this year on nuclear energy, and I must again start by noting the Trump Administration's troubling attacks on the safety of our nation's nuclear reactors. The President claims to support nuclear energy, but his Administration's actions – whether carried out by the Department of Energy (DOE) or his DOGE minions at the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) – seem designed to make nuclear energy less safe.

There is no path forward for the nuclear industry in this nation unless there is public confidence in its safety. The industry and its regulators have worked hard to invest in that public confidence over the years, but President Trump has completely jeopardized those decades of work in just 18 months. Any nuclear legislation that we consider must acknowledge that reality.

And that's why I am pleased Ranking Member Castor's bill, the Department of Energy Nuclear Transparency Act, is among the bills we are discussing today. This is a critically important bill considering the Administration's concerning actions on nuclear energy.

Last year, President Trump issued an Executive Order directing DOE to authorize three test reactors and get them operational this year by the nation's 250th birthday. In response, DOE created the so-called "Reactor Pilot Program" which it began marketing as a fast-pass to an NRC license. Let me be clear: DOE has no authority to issue a fast-pass to an NRC license, but that's not stopping them from trying.

Then, last week, DOE announced that the first reactor from the program had achieved a self-sustaining nuclear reaction. That announcement was effectively the first public signal from the Department on the progress of the program. A nuclear reactor licensed by the NRC would have had a license, made available to the public for anyone to read. While DOE has authored safety analyses for these reactors, they are not available anywhere for public inspection. DOE also failed to publicly announce when Secretary Wright gave final approval to authorize this first test reactor.

While these actions do not mean that there is anything wrong with this individual reactor that achieved an important milestone last week, we simply have no idea about the rigor or quality of work that went into evaluating its safety. We would NOT find this acceptable with a commercial nuclear reactor, so we should NOT find it acceptable for a test reactor, either.

Ranking Member Castor's bill would create critical transparency safeguards to ensure that safety analyses, final approvals, and the rules of the road for these reactors are made public.

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The NRC has been a model for transparency since Chairman Nieh took the reins. We must ensure that DOE follows in the NRC's footsteps. That is a common-sense idea that I would hope we could agree on.

Earlier this year, I said that it would be difficult for us to move forward on nuclear legislation while public confidence in our nation's nuclear fleet had been called into question. Advancing Ranking Member Castor's bill helps address many – but not all – of my concerns.

While some of the bills before us today are well-intentioned attempts to ensure that the NRC's licensing process works smoothly for all kinds of advanced nuclear technologies, I do have concerns with one draft bill in particular that I hope our Republicans will work with us on.

The Nuclear Advisory Committee Reform Act sharply limits the role of the Advisory Committee on Reactor Safeguards, or ACRS, which provides a valuable independent, technical perspective to the NRC and NRC licensees throughout the licensing process. I am open to ways to make the work of the ACRS more efficient and encourage them to focus on the highest-priority reviews.

But I am uncomfortable with the approach currently taken by the draft bill, which would prevent the ACRS from providing feedback on a license application unless explicitly requested by the NRC – even if the advisory committee itself felt that its review would be important. I am uncomfortable with that approach given the fact the Trump Administration has already targeted the ACRS, attempting to reduce its size and limit its functions.

I hope we can find a bipartisan path forward on the proposed suite of bills before us today. My major concern is safety, the safety of our nuclear reactors. And I must repeat again that if we don't have complete confidence in safety, then moving forward with many of these reactors is going to be a problem. With that I yield back the balance of my time.