

Committee on Energy and Commerce

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

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

September 15, 2026

Nearly 70 years ago, the United States' first ever commercial nuclear power plant opened. Ever since, nuclear energy has been an important source of carbon-free electricity generation. Unfortunately, while many things have changed, one thing was true back then that's still true today – we have no real plan about what to do with the spent fuel that comes out of nuclear reactors.

Today, we find ourselves on the edge of a potential nuclear renaissance. I've spent a lot of time this year discussing the risks to that renaissance posed by declining public confidence in the industry, especially after the Trump Administration spent last year attacking our safety framework for nuclear energy. But just as important to public confidence, especially in the communities that actually host nuclear plants, is figuring out what to do with the waste.

For years, the answer was that we would find a single location in the country to house all the waste. But after decades, we're no closer to achieving that goal than we were back when Congress passed the Nuclear Waste Policy Act in 1982. That's why recent proposals to get buy-in from states have much more promise than a top-down approach.

However, at the end of the day, any agreement with a state will live and die by trust. And, frankly, it's been impossible to trust the Trump White House or the Trump Administration's Department of Energy. DOE has admitted in court that it has canceled investments in states for political reasons – so I am concerned that they could pull the same nasty illegal trick with states that commit to the nuclear innovation campuses.

DOE has also had an astonishing lack of transparency when it comes to its plans to authorize nuclear reactors for research purposes.

I also have deep concerns with some of the specifics of the legislative proposal the Administration has put forward to enable the innovation campuses. The proposal declared that the innovation campuses would automatically receive any environmental permits and that none of the activities related to the innovation campuses would be subject to judicial review. I want to be clear: that's an absolute non-starter, and those provisions cannot and will not become law.

I am also cautious about the Administration's focus on reprocessing of spent nuclear fuel. Reprocessing technologies have potential, and I was happy to support a bill to clarify the licensing pathway for some reprocessing facilities just a few weeks ago at a markup. But the

reality is right now it's simply not economic – and we don't know if it ever will be. I don't want states, taxpayers, or ratepayers to get stuck with the bill for a technology that isn't proven or doesn't pan out. While there may be a place for reprocessing in the nation's spent fuel disposal strategy, we must be strategic and thoughtful about what that place is – and I'm concerned the Administration isn't quite there yet.

But I don't want to be overly negative about these initiatives. I want to work with you, Assistant Secretary Garrish, and my colleagues to get this right. These innovation campuses represent a once-in-a-generation opportunity to make progress on an issue that our nation has struggled with for 70 years. Things are going to have to change if this is going to work. The Department of Energy will have to become much more transparent about all its activities in the nuclear space. It will also have to make credible commitments that all interference with the Nuclear Regulatory Commission will stop and never resume.

But, perhaps most importantly, we don't have to solve all these issues in one proposal. Just getting something on the table that will allow communities with shut down nuclear plants – like Oyster Creek in my home state – to start moving the fuel away and to a central site, even if it's temporary, will be more progress than we've ever seen.

With that, I yield back the balance of my time.