



TESTIMONY OF

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For a Hearing

BEFORE

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Committee on Energy and Commerce
Subcommittee on Energy

ON

Nuclear Regulatory Commission: Oversight Of Activities,
Priorities, And Fiscal Year 2027 Budget

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**Statement of Commissioner Bradley R. Crowell
before the House Energy and Commerce Committee
Subcommittee on Energy
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Chairman Latta, Vice Chairman Weber, Ranking Member Castor, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me and my fellow Commissioners to appear before you today to discuss the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's Fiscal Year 2027 budget request and related licensing and regulatory activities. Today, we find ourselves at a pivotal juncture that will determine the future of commercial nuclear power not just in the United States, but around the world.

As I began my term on the Commission in mid-2022, I was excited to get to work and help lead an ongoing transformation at the NRC to match my growing confidence in our country's collective ability to position the U. S. as the world leader for the next generation of nuclear energy technologies. But most importantly, to do so while maintaining the United States' hard-earned, world-class reputation for nuclear safety and security. And while change rarely happens as fast as any of us would like, I assure you that the NRC is moving with urgency in the right direction.

I am proud to have helped facilitate the many accomplishments and milestones achieved by agency staff in just the last few years. Chairman Nieh highlighted many of the NRC's most recent successes in his remarks, and I share his optimism that we are building a framework to accelerate further achievements in the next few years, and beyond. However, success is far from guaranteed. Continued U.S. leadership in nuclear energy generation rests on our nation's steadfast commitment to nuclear safety and security.

As we look ahead, my confidence in our nuclear future is buoyed by Congress building and sustaining bipartisan support for nuclear power as an indispensable contributor to our nation's energy needs. And in doing so, for giving the NRC the policy direction and resources needed to modernize its approach to responsible nuclear regulation and oversight without sacrificing safety or security. I appreciate the current and past members of this Committee for their help directing needed reforms at the NRC, including through the 2019 Nuclear Energy Innovation and Modernization Act (NEIMA) and the 2024 ADVANCE Act. These key legislative accomplishments provided needed policy support to accelerate the NRC's ongoing efforts to modernize its regulatory approach and sharpen the agency's focus in establishing a refreshed platform for success.

To further advance these Congressional efforts, the current Administration issued Executive Order (E. O.) 14300 last May, "Ordering the Reform of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission." The thrust of this E.O. doubles down on much of the agency's ongoing work and related reform efforts. Viewed positively, the E. O. is welcome recognition of the integral role the NRC can play in catalyzing the safe and secure deployment of new and advanced nuclear energy systems. But getting it right is more important than moving quickly in pursuit of artificial timelines. Keeping apace and working efficiently are important, but moving with haste alone can quickly become counterproductive. The oft-repeated mantra for fostering rapid advancements in many cutting-edge technology sectors is to "move fast and break things." But while that ethos may

apply well in some technology sectors, it is the antithesis of safe, secure, and informed nuclear regulation.

The legitimate need to enhance regulatory efficiencies without impacting safety is also the reason my greatest concerns as a Commissioner today all relate to the current and future NRC workforce. The agency is being directed to do more with less despite a growing workload and aggressive new timeframes for agency licensing and oversight activities. This is an unsustainable dynamic. The NRC staff is the key to successfully turning our present-day challenges into future successes. They are undoubtedly our most vital asset. We must **do better to** retain and recruit talented staff.

In my role as an NRC Commissioner, I am often asked what keeps me awake at night. As of late, my response is always to question whether we are doing enough to support and supplement our staff and ensure that the NRC workforce is robust and resourced to do the anticipated work coming before the agency without sacrificing our commitment and attention to safety and security. And while we have recently filled out many spots on the NRC's Senior Leadership Team as part of the agency's reorganization directed by E.O. 14300, we now have many new faces in new places, many of whom are assuming these new roles as first time senior leaders and agency executives.

My second greatest concern for FY 2027 is the NRC's continued ability to execute on the NRC's full mission, including the oversight of our nation's current fleet of nuclear power reactors. While I wholeheartedly support the need to incorporate new efficiencies into all processes throughout the agency, we must not let the fervor of deregulation and a singular focus on operational efficiencies undermine the NRC's critical role in ensuring the continued safe and secure operation of existing NRC licensed facilities. For example, I am concerned that shifting the agency's focus to licensing activities too heavily or too quickly will come at the expense of maintaining sufficient talent and resources focused on our equally important oversight responsibilities. At our current juncture, the NRC can ill-afford to "rob Peter to pay Paul", nor can we have "unforced errors" within our existing fleet of reactors and fuel facilities. Weakening essential oversight programs represents the greatest risk to establishing the true and lasting nuclear renaissance we are all working so hard to foster.

To rise to the momentous occasion before us, the NRC must also restore, build, and maintain public trust. I am concerned on this front because the surest way to undermine the public's confidence in nuclear safety and, in the NRC's role as safety regulator, is to decrease transparency. This maxim is true for all things nuclear – but is particularly acute with respect to nuclear power generation and used fuel management. Over the past year, circumstances have clouded stakeholder belief in the agency's commitment to transparency as a pillar of the NRC's Principles of Good Regulation. The agency's ability to seek and receive valuable input from external experts, non-governmental agencies, trade associations, members of the public, and other key stakeholders has also been hampered as we embark on a historic retooling of the NRC's entire regulatory framework. As we make progress modernizing the NRC, we must also retain a reasonable ability to engage proactively and transparently with regulated entities, states, local communities, and all other stakeholders. Failure to do so risks undermining public trust and forfeiting the "social license" essential to an enduring future for nuclear technologies. Specifically, one essential component to remake and improve the NRC's traditional public and stakeholder engagement process is to recognize that effective engagement requires going beyond simply meeting the basic requirements of the Administrative Procedures Act and other relevant

statutes. Public comment and stakeholder engagement are not synonyms. During my remaining time on the Commission, I will continue to seek new ways for agency staff to conduct meaningful public engagement without compromising the efficiency we all desire.

Lastly, I see in the current cadre of NRC Commissioners as a set of leaders with diverse skill sets and unique perspectives that constitute the right mix, at the right time, for effectively leading the NRC at this crucial juncture. We each understand and appreciate the necessity and value of working as a collegial, policy-making body. But this does not mean always agreeing. It means communicating regularly and honestly, and working together toward the best outcomes, with clear direction and durable decisions for the agency. As Commissioners, we owe this to the NRC workforce, the regulated community, and the American people.

With adequate resources for the agency and with clear, consistent leadership, I believe the NRC can achieve many great things. I intend to do my part to ensure we meet our responsibilities to the NRC workforce, and our obligations to the American public for whom we serve. As of today, I have 434 days remaining in my current term. During that time, I hope I will be invited here again to discuss candidly the challenges and opportunities ahead on our road to a lasting nuclear renaissance in the U.S. While I have concerns, my belief in our shared goals across government, with support from both sides of the aisle, fuels my unyielding optimism and measured confidence that we can stay on the high end of this slope and on the right side of history. Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.