

**Statement of Commissioner Bradley R. Crowell  
before the House Energy and Commerce Committee  
Subcommittee on Energy, Climate, and Grid Security  
July 23, 2024**

Chair Duncan, Ranking Member DeGette, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to offer testimony on the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's (NRC) Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 budget request. I appreciate joining my Commission colleagues to discuss the important work of the NRC and how we are tackling—and in fact embracing—the present-day challenges facing the agency. Indeed, I see the many challenges before us not as obstacles, but as opportunities, for the agency to execute its mission while meeting the expectations of Congress, our licensees and other stakeholders, and the American people.

Chair Hanson and my Commission colleagues highlighted in their statements a number of notable accomplishments by the NRC over the previous year, but also the considerable workload currently before agency staff and the Commission. This workload is expected to steadily increase in FY 2025 and beyond as our nation's energy needs continue to grow and the demand for carbon-free, baseload nuclear power increases. This growing demand and commensurate workload reflect the unprecedented advancements in nuclear technologies in recent years—including both fission and fusion technologies. With respect to fusion, having joined the Commission just two years ago, I could not have envisioned the breakthroughs we have seen in fusion energy and the corresponding interest in fusion energy systems by the private sector. These advancements are nothing short of remarkable and encouraging. I applaud the NRC for recognizing these advancements and putting the regulatory wheels in motion to keep apace, and for Congress helping provide the tools and resources to do so.

The NRC has a unique opportunity to play a critical role in addressing some of the most challenging and pressing issues facing our nation today. While addressing climate change, reducing carbon emissions, and enhancing energy security obviously come to mind, there are many other over-arching policy objectives where the safe application of nuclear technologies has the potential to result in significant benefits for our collective well-being, including exciting developments in nuclear medicine and agriculture, just to name a few. In addition to reviewing and licensing new nuclear technologies, it is also imperative for the NRC to ensure our nation's current fleet of nuclear reactors continues to meet well-established safety and security standards. As our nation's regulator for the safe and secure use of civilian nuclear technologies, the NRC is committed to meeting our responsibilities such that the public can have full confidence that all NRC licensees operate in manner that minimizes risk and maximizes safety. Notably, we must also execute our mission today and in the years ahead in the context of an increasingly complex geopolitical environment and while also adapting to the rapidly accelerating impacts of climate change. The ability of the NRC to maintain its reputation—domestically and internationally—as the “gold standard” for nuclear regulation is more crucial today than at any time since the advent of the agency.

While independent, Commission-led agencies, such as the NRC, were established as intentionally distinct from other executive branch federal agencies, I presume Congress did not intend for independent federal agencies to operate in a vacuum or be exempt from the inherent, collective responsibility of all federal agencies to work cooperatively in tackling tough, multi-jurisdictional issues. Indeed, common-sense cooperation among government agencies at all levels – from local to federal and tribal, is a bedrock principle of public service and a hallmark of

a government “for the people.” Therefore, I believe the NRC must quickly adapt to embrace the shared responsibility to reduce carbon emissions and enhance energy security within the context of executing our role as the safety regulator overseeing the safe and secure civilian use of nuclear power and materials.

With adequate resources for the agency and with clear, consistent leadership from the Commission, I believe we can achieve many great things. And I believe the budget before you today for consideration can meet our agency goals as well as the expectations and policy direction from Congress and the Administration. I am confident the NRC staff is up to the challenge.

However, to meet this moment, the NRC must restore, build, and maintain public trust through proactive and meaningful engagement with the public, other governmental organizations, and the full spectrum of stakeholders. I firmly believe that our responsibilities for engagement must go beyond simply meeting the basic requirements of the Administrative Procedures Act and other relevant statutes. The NRC has significant room for improvement to better engage with individuals and communities unfamiliar with our agency and how our mission touches their daily lives. In doing so, we must recommit our efforts for using plain, understandable language and leveraging communication channels common to those who don’t have the luxury of time – or the responsibility - to understand nuclear physics. I believe we must do this and – importantly - we can.

As a key part of meeting this commitment, the NRC must also maintain a dedicated focus on safely regulating the full fuel cycle -- asserting commensurate attention to issues from uranium recovery to spent fuel and nuclear waste management. A responsible, holistic approach necessitates fully integrating both the front and back end of the nuclear fuel cycle into our regulatory decisions, oversight, and research activities. Proactive engagement on used fuel management, decommissioning, and waste disposal is critical to enhancing public confidence. Failing to do so will have the opposite effect.

To successfully turn our present-day challenges into future successes, the NRC must retain and recruit talented staff. We also must better monitor and address needs within our workforce in order to raise morale and to return the NRC to being consistently ranked among the best places to work in the federal government. As I said at a recent Commission meeting focused on workforce issues, all of us at the NRC own this challenge: the Commission, senior career leadership, and the staff—all of us. A major workforce need right now is to fill key senior career leadership roles, including several positions required by statute to be selected by the Commission. I am proud to highlight recent progress on this front—including filling key positions such as General Counsel, Chief Financial Officer, and, most recently, a new Executive Director for Operations, the highest-ranking career official at the agency. And of course, as you can plainly see before you today, the Commission itself has a vacancy. I hope we can add a fifth Commissioner as soon as possible, as the Commission functions best and most efficiently with a full complement of five Commissioners.

While we have made progress, we still have work to do. We owe this to the staff, who work so hard every day to keep apace in the face of growing demands and pressures. I intend to do my part to ensure that we fulfill this responsibility to our workforce, and therefore our obligations to the public for whom we serve. I am excited by the challenge of what we can, and must, accomplish by the end of this decade. The FY 2025 budget request is an important next step to ensure the NRC has the resources necessary to meet this pivotal moment. Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.