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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY
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March 15, 2022

The Honorable Christopher T. Hanson
Chairman
Nuclear Regulatory Commission
11555 Rockville Pike
Rockville, MD 20852

The Honorable Jennifer Granholm
Secretary
United States Department of Energy
1000 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20585

Dear Chairman Hanson and Secretary Granholm,

The importance of having secure, stable, and reliable domestic energy supplies in America has never been more obvious. Advanced nuclear energy will help make our clean energy future a reality, and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC or the Commission) will be critical to the development of this sector.

However, we are concerned that the current licensing process poses unique challenges for the development and deployment of advanced nuclear reactors, and if left unaddressed, has the potential to stifle United States innovation and slow the progress of essential next-generation clean energy technologies.

The United States House of Representatives Committee on Science, Space, and Technology (House Science Committee) has long advocated for advanced nuclear research and development. We see its vast potential and hope to encourage its development. In the United States, nuclear energy currently accounts for nearly 20 percent of our overall electricity generation and over 50 percent of our emissions-free energy production.[1] In order for the United States to strengthen its energy independence, retain its leadership in energy innovation, and address global climate change, we must prioritize the commercialization of new, advanced nuclear energy technologies.

[1] DEP'T OF ENERGY, "Five Fast Facts about Nuclear Energy," Mar. 23, 2021, https://www.energy.gov/ne/articles/5-fast-facts-about-nuclear-energy.

Over the past five years, bipartisan support for and investment in nuclear energy has reached an all-time high. Together, the Nuclear Energy Innovation Capabilities Act (Public Law No. 115-248), the Nuclear Energy Innovation and Modernization Act (Public Law No. 115-439), and the Energy Act of 2020 (Div. Z of Public Law No. 116-260) provided the Department of Energy (DOE) and the NRC with significant direction to accelerate the development and deployment of advanced nuclear energy and reactor technologies.

The NRC has an essential role to play in the future of advanced reactors, one that requires the Commission to maintain flexibility and quickly adapt to a changing technology landscape. The billions of dollars spent on nuclear research and development at DOE over the last decade will not produce any benefits without a clear licensing process in place for the reactors developed through these efforts.

For example, DOE, through its Advanced Reactor Demonstration Program, authorized in the Energy Act of 2020, has committed $3.2 billion to build and operate advanced nuclear reactors in the United States.[2] What would it mean for our national security and the American taxpayer if these reactors are built, tested, and deemed operational, but ultimately cannot be licensed in a replicable, timely manner? Failure to adequately bridge this gap would result in a massive blow to the United States energy leadership and represent one of the largest wastes of taxpayer dollars in modern history.

No nuclear stakeholder should view the NRC's approval process with uncertainty. The House Science Committee has an established history of working with the NRC to understand the Commission's progress and needs related to advanced nuclear reactor licensing. In July 2015, our Energy Subcommittee held a hearing titled "A Review of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's Licensing Process," in which then-Chairman Stephen Burns testified that the NRC "will continue to look for additional opportunities to work with DOE and make the NRC's licensing processes transparent and navigable to reactor designers/potential applicants, the financing community, and other stakeholders."[3]

In light of this history, we are optimistic that the NRC will continue to work with us to identify any potential barriers to success for the advanced nuclear community and communicate with us to address these obstacles. We strongly encourage the NRC to increase their level of communication with DOE and the Committee. We also encourage the Commission to continue to examine their licensing process for opportunities to improve and modernize their approach.

In order for Congress to continue responsible investments in clean energy production, we must plan ahead to ensure success throughout the technology pipeline, from early-stage research and development, through deployment. We ask that DOE increase their level of communication with

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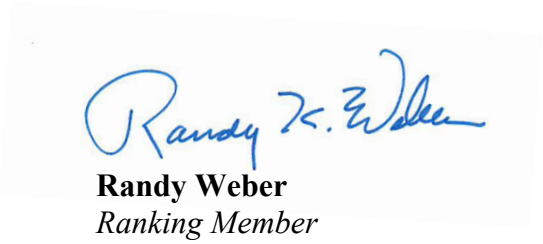
[2] DEP'T OF ENERGY, "*U.S. Dep't of Energy Announces $160 Million in First Awards under Advanced Reactor Demonstration Program*," Oct. 13, 2021, https://www.energy.gov/ne/articles/us-department-energy-announces-160-million-first-awards-under-advanced-reactor.

[3] *A Review of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's Licensing Process: Hearing Before the H. Comm. on Sci., Space, and Tech*., 114th Cong. 23 (2015) (statement of Stephen Burns, Chairman, U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission).

the NRC and prioritize information sharing on the technical development of advanced nuclear reactors as early as possible to ensure an effective technology transition process.

Thank you for your attention to these important matters.

Sincerely,



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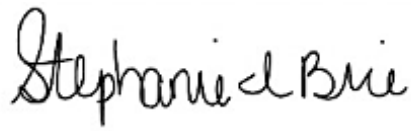

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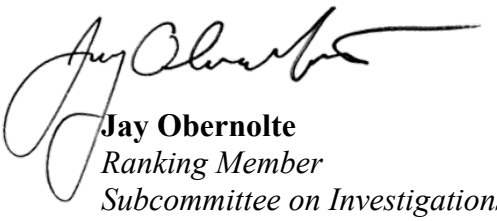

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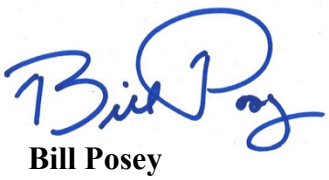

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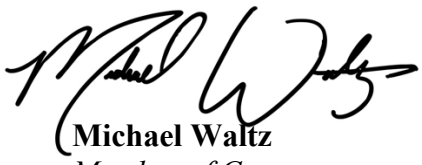

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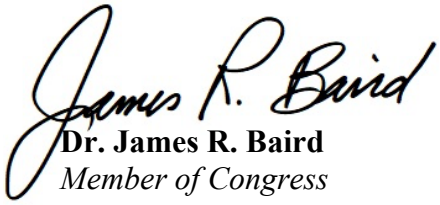

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cc: Chairman Jamaal Bowman, House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology Subcommittee on Energy

Chairwoman Eddie Bernice Johnson, House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology