

COMMITTEE ON
**SCIENCE, SPACE, AND
TECHNOLOGY**
CHAIRMAN LAMAR SMITH



For Immediate Release
July 29, 2015

Media Contact: Zachary Kurz
(202) 225-6371

Statement of Chairman Lamar Smith (R-Texas)

A Review of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's Licensing Process

Chairman Smith: Today's hearing will examine opportunities for advances in nuclear fission and fusion energy technologies.

We will hear from the Chairman of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Stephen Burns, who will provide the regulatory perspective on matters of policy for the next generation of nuclear energy technology.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) is an independent regulatory agency that licenses and regulates America's civilian nuclear material and technology. The NRC was established in 1974 when Congress separated the supportive nuclear research and development (R&D) aspects of the Atomic Energy Commission from its regulatory side. Currently, the Department of Energy (DOE) supports nuclear R&D to advance nuclear science while the NRC licenses new technologies as the private sector brings them to the market.

Today, we will get a better understanding of how DOE can more effectively advance innovation in nuclear energy and align its R&D priorities to fill gaps where the NRC is not permitted to do so. Nuclear energy provides reliable, zero-emission power. This technology represents a great opportunity for innovation to increase our Nation's economic prosperity and global competitiveness.

Yet the status quo is not working to bring new reactor concepts to the market. One challenge is that the NRC's licensing mechanism for alternative reactor concepts is not yet fully developed. This is not necessarily a fault of the NRC as it must first oversee the safety of its licensees, which fund 90 percent of the Commission's budget. The NRC's strict mission focus has helped the U.S. nuclear industry attain one of the safest working environments in the world.

This Committee's responsibility, however, is to look beyond today. We must search for opportunities where our Nation's R&D can help make our future brighter. The DOE national laboratories provide vital capabilities for the private sector to invest in innovative energy technologies. This includes its open-access user facilities, which are one-of-a-kind machines that allow researchers to investigate fundamental scientific questions.

These facilities enable a wide array of researchers from academia, defense, and the private sector to develop new technologies without favoring one type of design. This represents a better approach than simply picking winners and losers through energy subsidies.

DOE's labs also provide the fundamental research capabilities that lead to scientific publications or proprietary research. For nuclear energy R&D, this research is especially challenging because of the inherent regulatory burden that comes with using nuclear material.

For this reason, the DOE and NRC should cooperate where appropriate to ensure that the R&D investments we make today will reach the market for the benefit of all Americans tomorrow.

Thank you Mr. Chairman and I yield back.

###