

ONE HUNDRED TWELFTH CONGRESS
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE
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Opening Statement of Rep. Henry A. Waxman
Ranking Member, Committee on Energy and Commerce
Hearing on “NRC Policy and Governance Oversight”
Subcommittee on Environment and the Economy and Subcommittee on Energy and Power
July 24, 2012

I want to begin by welcoming Dr. Allison Macfarlane, the new chairman of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. I look forward to hearing your testimony and perspectives on how to refocus the Commission’s energy on the safety and security of America’s nuclear power plants.

The mission of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission is to license and regulate the nation’s civilian use of nuclear materials to “ensure adequate protection of public health and safety, to promote the common defense and security, and to protect the environment.”

This is a vital mission, but for the last year and half, the Commission has been distracted from its responsibilities by politicians who second-guessed its decisions and sowed internal dissension. Regrettably, this Committee helped fan the flames of discord within the Commission by looking for any opportunity to cast aspersions on the former Chairman. It is time to move on.

We have four commissioners here today, including the new chairman. We should focus on examining important nuclear safety issues, not rehashing old grudges.

There’s no shortage of issues to discuss, from the ongoing shut-down of the San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station in California due to safety concerns to the status of NRC’s post-Fukushima review of nuclear power plant safety in the United States.

It’s been more than a year since the Fukushima nuclear accident in Japan. Japan’s independent commission investigating the events leading up to the disaster recently concluded that the power plant operator and Japan’s nuclear regulators failed to implement basic safety measures despite known risks posed by earthquakes, tsunamis, and other events that can cause long-term blackouts at reactors. This is a cautionary tale for the United States, one that NRC should heed when implementing lessons learned from the Fukushima disaster.

I look forward to hearing testimony from the witnesses, and I thank them for their time.