

ONE HUNDRED TWELFTH CONGRESS
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE
2125 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6115

Majority (202) 225-2927
Minority (202) 225-3641

Opening Statement of Rep. Henry A. Waxman
Ranking Member, Committee on Energy and Commerce
Hearing on “The Role of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission in America's Energy Future”
Subcommittee on Energy and Power and the Subcommittee on
Environment and the Economy
May 4, 2011

The mission of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) 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.” Today, we will have the opportunity to hear from four of the five NRC Commissioners about their efforts to carry out this mission.

It is an important time for the NRC and for America’s nuclear energy industry.

First, the nation’s fleet of reactors is proposed to grow. Utilities have submitted license applications to NRC to build 26 new nuclear reactors.

Second, America’s strategy for storing nuclear waste is at a crossroads. The President has determined that the Yucca Mountain facility is not workable and has created a Blue Ribbon Commission to review alternatives for storing, processing, and disposing of spent nuclear fuel and nuclear waste. The Commission’s report, due out next summer, will help guide us in how to use 21st century technology to safely store the country’s nuclear waste.

And third, the world is facing the most serious nuclear disaster in decades. NRC is continuing to review the safety of American nuclear reactors in light of what happened at the Fukushima power plant in Japan.

It is too soon to say with certainty what caused the accident in Japan and what role, if any, lax regulatory oversight of the industry played in the catastrophe. Here in the United States, we are not immune to catastrophic events resulting from regulatory failures, as we saw with the 2008 financial collapse and the BP oil spill. It is our duty to learn lessons from the Fukushima disaster and close any gaps in our oversight of America’s nuclear fleet.

Mr. Chairman, I thank you for holding this hearing. The Committee needs to be performing regular oversight hearings such as this one.

I look forward to the testimony from today’s witnesses.