

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

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37TH ANNUAL REGULATORY INFORMATION CONFERENCE

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SPECIAL GUEST SPEAKER PLENARY

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TUESDAY

MARCH 11, 2025

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The Session was held at the Bethesda North Marriott Hotel & Conference Center and via virtual platform, at 9:00 a.m. EDT.

SPEAKERS

THE HONORABLE SHELLEY MOORE CAPITO, U.S. Senator and Chairman of
the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works
THE HONORABLE DAVID A. WRIGHT, Chairman, NRC

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P-R-O-C-E-E-D-I-N-G-S

9:01 a.m.

CHAIRMAN WRIGHT: Thank you. Good morning again. So we're honored to have the Chairman of the United States Environment and Public Works Committee with us this morning. For those of you who don't know, that is our oversight committee. And they do a lot for us, and they're trying to help encourage us as well.

Senator Shelley Moore Capito was first elected by the people of West Virginia to the United States Senate in 2014, becoming the first female senator in West Virginia's storied history. And in 2020, she was reelected, winning more than 70% of the vote in all 55 counties of the state. Talk about a mandate.

After serving West Virginia's 2nd congressional district in the U.S. House for 14 years, and as a member of the West Virginia House of Delegates four years prior that, Senator Capito decided to run for the U.S. Senate to be an even stronger voice for the Mountain State.

She believes that the challenges today demand bipartisan solutions and cooperation across the aisle to advance legislation that benefits West Virginia and the country as a whole. For the 119th Congress, Senator Capito serves on the Appropriations Committee; the Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee; the Environment and Public Works Committee, where she serves as chairman; and the Rules and Administration Committee.

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Senator Capito also serves as the chairman of the Senator Republican Policy Council, or Committee, the fourth highest position in the Senate Republican leadership. You know, being the father of two daughters myself, I found it notable that she launched the West Virginia Girls Rise Up program to inspire the next generation of female leaders.

As chairman and leader of the EPW Committee, Chairman Capito is committed to promoting a commonsense regulatory strategy and protecting affordable, reliable energy production, building our nation's infrastructure, and encouraging economic development.

A lifelong West Virginian herself, Senator Capito was born in Glen Dale in the northern panhandle of the state. She earned a Bachelor of Science in Zoology from Duke University and a Master's in Education from the University of Virginia.

She and her husband Charles reside in Charleston, and they have three adult children and eight grandchildren.

Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome Senator Shelley Moore Capito.

SENATOR CAPITO: Well, thank you, Chairman Wright, for the very nice introduction. And it's a big crowd here today. You nuclear people get up early and get going. This is great, it's great to be here.

As I was listening to the chairman talk about the NRC, I realized that the NRC and the U.S. Senate have a couple pretty

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big similarities. Tough places to change, nobody likes change. And you said the NRC has a lot of older people. Well, I'll just leave it at that. So I'm very pleased to be here.

I always have a chuckle, especially in a room that I know has a lot of scientists here, when my bio was read and it says that I majored in zoology at Duke University. Because a lot of people say how did you get from zoology to being in the U.S. Senate, and I said, well, I serve in the biggest zoo in America, the United States Senate. It always gets a big laugh at the Rotary Club circuit, so thanks for giving me a little chuckle there.

So I'm very happy to be here with you today to celebrate the 50th anniversary or birthday of NRC and to discuss the future of our nation's nuclear industry. As mentioned, I am from West Virginia, an energy state, and I'm really pleased to be chairing the EPW Committee for this session of Congress.

Let me just give you a little background on our state of West Virginia. We have largely been producing energy for the last 100 years through our coal and natural gas resources. And energy production is something that the Mountain State is very, very proud of in our legacy.

Coal was discovered in our state over in 1792, which, you know, I did not realize this, and before we even became a state. Remember, we became a state in 1863, because West -- because Virginia decided that they were not good enough for us, so

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we transferred ourselves over to West Virginia during the Civil War.

And we also have natural gas, and oil was first discovered in Burning Springs, West Virginia, in 1859. So we've got a great history there.

We've kind of paved the way of powering the nation through a couple world wars and the industrial revolution, and we want to be a part of the next revolution of energy production. And we want to provide that, a reliable and affordable energy that people need every single day.

So, as we look to the future, we look towards, at least from our state, we look towards a changing energy landscape, and we accept that and know that, that it's coming.

So in 2012 -- I think 2022, excuse me, West Virginia legislature, believe it not, we had in our legislature that you could only produce energy in our state, I mean power, in our state through the use of coal. Every other source was prohibited, except renewables were okay.

And in 2022, nuclear became a part of our -- hi, Chris -- of our -- there they all are, right there. I can't even question them, they're right there.

But so anyway, we -- West Virginia became a part of the nuclear energy expansion possibilities. We also started the process to become an NRC agreement state so that we could help

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have the regulatory authority over what goes on in our state.

So, I'm excited about that, and it's a lot of chatter, both in the state legislature with the governor and others. But also a lot of investors coming in to look at -- we're, I think, in West Virginia I think has a great possible expansion opportunity as we have a lot of power generation that has -- is aging. And will be either cycling off or is already cycled off.

But we still have grid and other things at those sites. Plus brownfield development possibilities, and so we're excited about that in West Virginia.

So, as you know, and you all know this more, we need more power every day, 24/7, affordable, reliable, 365 days here in the United States. That's the demand. And some of the biggest and most well known companies are putting hundreds of millions of dollars behind these efforts and setting ambitious deployment schedules. That's where you guys come in.

Beyond that, keeping the lights on, nuclear plays a great part of our everyday lives. You know, you really don't even think about it. A lot of people don't think about it. But nuclear isotopes are used to save millions of lives every single day.

We use it obviously in our national defense technologies. It's also used in oil and gas production. So it's not just power generation, it's a whole menu of uses and expansion opportunities I think that we have all across the nation.

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But in order for it to be successful, and I heard Chairman Wright talk about this, we got this, I got it, you're good at repeating things, that's very good. We got this, but it has to be an all, everybody's got to be on the team. And the U.S. Congress is no different here.

So, you know, I think as we look back at where we started many, many years ago with the Atomic Energy Commission, later becoming the NRC, and now into 50 years of NRC, I think that some of the foundational law that was put into place has become antiquated, not useful, needs to be moved.

That big ship needs to be moved into the direction of where we want to go in the future and what the demand is. As we were building on President Eisenhower's Atoms for Peace vision, Congress recognized a tremendous opportunity for atomic energy and declared it a vital part of our common defense and security. And that's no different today. And these principles of supply do apply to everything that we see today and where we want to see the expansions.

So, you know, the civil nuclear industry, born in 1957 with the operation of the first nuclear plant in Shippingport, Pennsylvania. It was only ten miles north of our West Virginia border, so there again, the history of energy production is all in the region where I am from.

And what does that provide? In some ways, that

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provides a ready and willing and understanding workforce that has worked for many, many years in the energy production industry. And the transitions that we see that include expansion of nuclear I think provide great opportunities to the people that I represent, and so I'm very excited about that.

So as we looked at the AEC, it faced a dual and conflicting task of promoting and regulating nuclear technology. The dual mission did not instill the sufficient level of public confidence that the emerging technology would be built and operated safely. Obviously that's number one, safety.

So in 1957, they began the mandatory hearing and establishing Advisory Committee on Reactor Safeguards. It seems so long ago in so many ways, but you know, it was sort of the dawn of a new era.

And it also created a federal backstop for liability from a nuclear incident known as Price-Anderson, which we did, at the very end of -- what year was that? Last year or the end? Got that into the year-end bill because it was set to lapse. So thank goodness we were able to extend that.

So then in '74 we passed the Energy Reorganization Act to establish the NRC and move forward that way. So you know, I think as we look at where we want to go, I think Chairman Wright mentioned that Congress is pushing the NRC.

And I think every time they come before the United

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States Senate, the questions are always asked about workforce and, you know, we tend to look at data, how many reactors have you looked at, how many extension have you done. What types of things are you looking at in terms of extension of life of plants that are existing.

This is where I think we came to the ADVANCE Act. It had been sort of in the motion for about five years. And that seems like a long time in some sense, but these are very complicated issues. You all are the experts here in the room. We rely on you as the experts in the room to help us guide the, put the guidelines of the regulatory environment in place so that we can best serve you.

We have a tendency to legislate to maybe last year's technologies or last year's parameters because we move so slowly. We look at where we are. We've got to look at this as a legislative body to be able to put the parameters in place so that you all can carry forward for next 50 years. I'm going to have to put my glasses on, you can probably see me straining to see there. Yeah.

So here we go. The agency has responded time and time again to put forward things like the reactor oversight program, extended the licensings for reactors that reached, had reached the end of their initial 40 years, and also successfully completed its safety review of the Department of Energy's Yucca Mountain application.

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And now you have extended the license to operate for 80 years. Just recently the first new reactors in a generation came online at Vogtle, the Vogtle site in Georgia. So a lot of exciting things.

But things are changing. I think the Commission does have challenges. And some of those are things that we see in oversight and some of those are things that are self-disclosed. It's nice when you're self-disclosing where your weaknesses are.

Licensing actions are taking longer and more costly, and while the technology and the experience has increased. So you would think as technology gets more sophisticated, as experience of the workforce gets better, it should be the opposite. It should be less expensive and more timely.

The agency is dedicating fewer of its staff and resources to actual licensing work. And the regulations and processes that were established for yesterday's technologies have become stagnant and updating those just takes too long. It just, our regulatory environment overall in every aspect, permitting, and this is no different, is such a cumbersome process, and very, very lengthy.

So now we're looking at energy reliability is a huge concern around the nation. Obviously wind and solar can't carry it. There's a, well, coal is declining as a resource. Natural gas is filling that gap.

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But we really need more base load, and we need more vibrant reliability so that we can also not provide the reliability but also provide the affordability I think that many of those, particularly in the heartland and where I live and everywhere in this country, are demanding. And nuclear must and will be part of the solution.

So that's where we came to the ADVANCE Act. As I mentioned earlier, it was a four-to-five-year project. I was very proud to be invited into the Oval Office to have President Biden sign this last summer.

In my bio too it mentions bipartisan solutions. This is a good one. Bipartisan, it passed in the House 393 to 11, and it passed 88 to 2 in the Senate. Now, you could ask yourself, where were the other 10 senators, and I don't know the answer to that question.

The ADVANCE Act really gives a suite of policies, I think, to reduce the regulatory costs, increase efficiency, predictability, and timeliness. That's the whole point.

And we must be ready to license new technologies for new uses. It can build on our previous successes and carry us into the next -- into the next several years. And they must -- but the Commission must be provided with the tools and the resources to achieve success.

So, we're in for generational change. We're up for

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it, the Congress is up for it. My ranking member is one of the biggest environmentalists in the United States Senate, Sheldon Whitehouse from Rhode Island, and he was the co-sponsor of this bill with me and is ready to get to work on.

Because a lot of people are asking me about what about ADVANCE Act? We always had a tendency to name everything that's the next generation, 2.0, I don't know if that's an old person's way of looking at it. But they're all asking about ADVANCE Act 2.0.

So, I would encourage everybody in this room to really build on the momentum that we have, understanding that we can ambitiously implement the ADVANCE Act and really get moving.

When you look at AI and data centers, when you look at what some of these large companies are doing and the investments that they're planning to make and pledging to make in this area, we have to have the regulatory environment to be able to move forward and the licensing availabilities so that this can actually happen.

So, I encourage all of you today to help us work -- the heavy lift. You know, I'm going to be honest with you. It sounded kind of easy to me, but apparently it wasn't as easy as I thought.

And so I think it's great that you were able to settle on it with a forward-looking vision that I think encapsulates where

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we all really want to go. So this is really a matter of national importance, too. This is how we see it in the United States Senate.

We know that there's a lot of competition for superiority in energy production and energy reliance and energy reliability and the technology that goes with this. We, this country, I think the United States needs to be the leader here. And we want to encourage that as well.

We talked a bit in, talked a little bit about some of the hiring practices and some of the availability of certain skill sets that the NRC needs and has to have. We've been very, very, as a Congress, very, very supportive of this and are excited to see where that senior staff leadership will be able to take this.

So, as the commissioners set the vision and create the policy and support ambitious staff proposals, they still, the NRC still answers to Congress, as Chairman Wright said. We are the oversight committee. And we're going to continue our committee to help modernize outdated laws and showcase what the committee does that works, but also get rid of what doesn't work.

This is a challenge all through government. We can look at new programs and be great advocates for that. What we really have difficult with is scraping out the old, antiquated policies that still either provide roadblocks, but then -- but at the same time, don't even make sense in the next generation as we

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look at either nuclear or any other kind of thing.

So I think we should all be very -- taking a lot of pride in this moment. I am. I think there's a lot of conversation about nuclear. I am really proud to be a part of the conversation.

So, as we're marking -- when we're all in this room and the NRC is marking its 100th anniversary -- just a little tongue in cheek there -- we will be celebrating that we actually stepped up to meet this moment today. I think that's where the excitement.

I am always -- I'm a proud, eternal optimist about nuclear, about the NRC, about this country, about my state, about my life and my family. I mean, we are so blessed to be where we are, and where we are in this point in history.

And so I want to join with all of you to capture that optimism to make sure that where we're leading and where we're -- if we're making mistakes that we fall back and correct. We do that all the time in our own lives, we should be doing that in our regulatory lives, and we should be doing that in our government lives.

And I join as your partner, as chair of the EPW Committee, to see that we have a successful, bright future that capitalizes on what I think is a very, very pivotal moment here in our country and really in the world for nuclear in all of the facets of where nuclear has a great niche in our -- to make our

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lives better, to bring our quality of life to where we want in a global sense. But also to keep America strong.

So thank you all very much.

CHAIRMAN WRIGHT: We'll take seats over here. You'll go in the middle, yeah.

SENATOR CAPITO: Middle child, in the middle. You're putting me in the middle.

CHAIRMAN WRIGHT: Well, I was an older child.

SENATOR CAPITO: You were an -- we can tell.

CHAIRMAN WRIGHT: So thank you for coming and being a part of this today.

SENATOR CAPITO: It's quite a gathering, impressive.

CHAIRMAN WRIGHT: We do. And they like good jokes, so laugh. So not that I'm a race with you, okay, but I'm the proud paw paw of nine grandchildren.

SENATOR CAPITO: Well, I'm going to have another one.

CHAIRMAN WRIGHT: Well, I just have --

SENATOR CAPITO: I'm not having it.

CHAIRMAN WRIGHT: Yeah, so learning that you have seven kind of struck a chord with me, right. I mean, you're a wife, you're a mother, you're a grandmother, and you got a pretty important job on the side, I think.

So for the benefit of the audience here, I'd like to know a little bit more about you as a, just a warm person, right.

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What do you do? Tell me a little bit about your family and that kind of stuff.

SENATOR CAPITO: Sure. Well, that's a nice question, thank you. Well, you mentioned that I was born and raised in West Virginia. I won't go through my entire history, but in a small town called Glen Dale, West Virginia, which is just south of Wheeling.

And there are several famous people from Glen Dale, West Virginia. One is my father was a former governor, so I'll count him as number one. Brad Paisley, the country signer, is from Glen Dale, West Virginia, and Lady Gaga's grandparents are from Glen Dale, West Virginia.

And I asked my aunt one time, who knew them quite well, I said, How did Lady Gaga get from Glen Dale, West Virginia to what she's. I don't know, they were always a little weird. But anyway, and so anyway, I was blessed to have a father who was in public service. And so that sort of inspired me to run for the very first time in 1996 for the House of Delegates.

I won by the smallest amount margin that you can almost imagine. And I remember saying to my dad, Gee, Dad, I didn't really do that good. I mean, I didn't win by much. And here's my life lesson from that: it doesn't matter, honey, you're there.

Okay, so I'm here. And same thing when I ran for Congress in 2000. I won by a very small margin, but I didn't have

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to ask him again, because I knew I was there. And so I have a very full life. I have -- my husband and I have lived in Charleston, West Virginia. We've been married 49 years.

CHAIRMAN WRIGHT: Wow.

SENATOR CAPITO: Yeah, we met on a blind date. People always want to know where you met. We met on a blind date. He looked like he was 12 when we met, but in any event, I did wonder about that. He is younger than me. But so we've got one of those marriages.

And so we have three children and we have eight grandchildren. And we have one -- we're going to have one more here through the summer.

I love sports. I play all kinds of sports. I've played golf and tennis. I played tennis in college. I loved -- I'll play card games. So I love to compete. And so how did I get a job where I got to compete every two years or every six years. And so I consider myself very competitive.

Some of the life lessons I've learned, because I do have a very busy life and I think everybody learns this in their life, one of the hardest things for a political figure to do when they're asked to come out to North Bethesda at eight in the morning is to say no. You have to learn to say no. I didn't say no.

CHAIRMAN WRIGHT: No.

SENATOR CAPITO: No, I didn't, but I'm sure I passed

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on 15 other things at eight in the morning on -- no, just kidding. But it's really, really difficult, and I think everybody in their lives, it's difficult to tell people no. And I think when you learn to say no, you sort of preserve your own sort of control over your own life.

And so I always prioritize. I have a great life, and I'm very blessed, and I have wonderful staff that help me fill my life with all kinds of data points on how to move through, you know, the very complicated things like nuclear.

CHAIRMAN WRIGHT: Yeah. So you actually hit on a couple of questions that I was going to ask.

SENATOR CAPITO: You were going to ask me about Lady Gaga, I knew that.

CHAIRMAN WRIGHT: So you know, we all have to decompress. And you were talking about your, and I learned that you're a pretty competitive person. I know you play tennis, I know you're -- you run, I believe.

SENATOR CAPITO: I do.

CHAIRMAN WRIGHT: And I was a long-distance runner in college. And you're co-chair of the Pickleball Caucus?

SENATOR CAPITO: Pickleball Caucus, yes. Well, it's supposedly the game for the aging, you know. And so I'm like had to get on it because, again, I'm in the Senate.

But you know, it's a little sensitive for me now

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because I was playing pickleball against my husband in August and he fell. It's the orthopedic surgeon's dream, is pickleball. We learned that.

CHAIRMAN WRIGHT: Yeah.

SENATOR CAPITO: And he broke his wrist. So maybe I'll get off that caucus, I think it might not be --.

CHAIRMAN WRIGHT: So I know you're like co-captain of the softball team, women's softball team.

SENATOR CAPITO: I am.

CHAIRMAN WRIGHT: I play softball here with some of my family here at the NRC. And I've umpired baseball for 50 years myself. I'll come call one of y'all's games. I know that you're a Duke basketball fanatic, I understand. I'm a Clemson alum.

SENATOR CAPITO: Great.

CHAIRMAN WRIGHT: So looking --

(Laughter.)

SENATOR CAPITO: Well, who just got -- wait a minute, who just got ranked number one this week?

CHAIRMAN WRIGHT: And who --

SENATOR CAPITO: Would that be the Duke Blue Devils?

CHAIRMAN WRIGHT: And who just broke the top ten?

SENATOR CAPITO: Oh, I know.

CHAIRMAN WRIGHT: That would probably be us.

SENATOR CAPITO: ACC tournament's going to be good.

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CHAIRMAN WRIGHT: And I hope we get to play y'all in the finals, and I hope we get to play you further in the Final Four. That would be awesome if we made it that far.

And so I wanted to ask you about that. How do you take -- how do you find time to decompress, right? How do you find the time because of, I mean, how busy you are and all that you do?

And the follow-up question is how would I get tickets to a Duke basketball?

SENATOR CAPITO: I even, I can't -- ask Rand Paul. He's graduated from med school at Duke. He's the only other Dukie at, presently in the Senate.

You know, I find time like everybody else does. I just prioritize what I want to do. And sometimes I don't get to do what I want to do, I'll do other things.

But I try to, when I'm here in Washington, which is pretty much all week, I'm running like 60, or I guess 160 today. Start early and I won't finish until after dinner. So that's pretty much the way the days go here.

We have -- this is a very busy time on Capitol Hill, and we don't have anything going on, except we do need to fund the government by Friday.

CHAIRMAN WRIGHT: Yes, you do.

SENATOR CAPITO: You know, what a way to run a

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railroad. We will do that, I have full confidence. But we've got to, you know, you talked about improvements that you want to make. You could make a long list for us I think. And one of those is to have a more functional appropriation.

CHAIRMAN WRIGHT: Yeah, the fact that you chose public service is noble. You know, everybody doesn't get in it for the same reason. But once you get in it, then it gets -- it does -- you learn to love it. You get, I mean, it's one of these, just one of these things that you love to help and try to make a difference.

What actually got you into public service? Was there something particular that did it? Was there an issue, was there -- because at local level is where it's at, right?

SENATOR CAPITO: Well, yeah, I was raised in politics. I was raised going to the dinners and riding in the parades and watching the vote count and so exciting. And we always had topics. My dad was in Congress for 12 years.

So we were here, we saw -- you know, back in the 60s, when he was in Congress, the Gemini astronauts, this was such a remarkable achievement, that they would come and address Congress.

And you know, now, you don't, you know, this generation doesn't even know when something's going up in space, it's private or whatever. You know, it's become such a run-of-the-mill thing. But back then, so my parents always really involved us in all this.

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We would go to those joint sessions and listen to that.

So that was the topic of the day. But what really got me, because I waited a little bit after the kids were older, a little bit older, and I live in this -- in the hometown now where our state legislature is. And the big topic for the state legislature was if you hit a deer with your car, can you eat it. Literally, it was the road kill bill.

And I thought to myself, I've got three kids in the public schools here, can we not sort of focus on things that are little bit more important than the road kill. By the way, it did pass. So if it happens in West Virginia, you want to take that sucker home with you, have a good time.

But so --

CHAIRMAN WRIGHT: So often today.

SENATOR CAPITO: They're everywhere, they're everywhere. And so anyway, I really thought to myself, it was something -- I think it was a yearning that was sort of hidden. And once I saw what they were doing and I thought we got kids. School safety was my big issue in the beginning. That was in the mid-90s.

And think about where we've come. And unfortunately not in some of the better ways. And that's sort of what jump-started me there. And I loved the state legislature, it was fun. It was only 60 days, that was the nice thing.

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And people say what's the difference, I said well, there's an end, to the state legislature there's an end. And there's no end to this. It's every day.

CHAIRMAN WRIGHT: Yeah, so you've been very passionate about the ADVANCE Act, getting it moving, getting it to the state, where it finally got passed and beyond a bipartisan effort. And we have been working hard since July to try to get everything that we needed to get report-wise done. We did get the mission statement done.

SENATOR CAPITO: Great.

CHAIRMAN WRIGHT: I think we hit the mark there. For the people in the audience here who are at the NRC, how are you going to -- what are the indicators for success that you're going to be looking for? Can you share some of that with us?

SENATOR CAPITO: Well, I think the indicators for -- is the indicator for success that we have, you know, five SMRs built by 2030? I don't think that's a good way to measure your progress and the progress of the industry. Speed is something that we would like to see, but not at the sacrifice of the core mission, obviously.

CHAIRMAN WRIGHT: Right.

SENATOR CAPITO: And so I think the fact that the road -- the rules of the road are clear, we can help you if we need. And hopefully you can do this as a commission, clear out the

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underbrush of things that are no longer useful, that are repetitive.

You know, you were talking about the alternative site issue. And Andy over there, who's my nuclear guru, we know Andy, you know, he said that that's part of the NEPA process. That you know, you have to have -- am I correct on that?

CHAIRMAN WRIGHT: Right.

SENATOR CAPITO: Is he correct on that, yes. And he is, thank you, good, fact checking my staff. But in any event --

CHAIRMAN WRIGHT: Part of your performance review.

SENATOR CAPITO: That sounds so cumbersome and so repetitive. If one site's good, why not -- why not go for it if it meets all the parameters. So we're going to try to look at permitting reform, which should help you and help -- help everybody here who's looking at development.

But I think honestly, if I see the conversations coming into my state of people that are looking for places to put data centers or looking for places to create that have excess power that can create power, or even site SMRs next to, which is one of the conversations that are coming, we can't just lollygag on this.

Because somebody's going to fill the gap and -- or we're going to lose. And all that investment will go overseas. We don't want to see that. So I think speed is important. Results, you know, to the final is measurable, and I think is

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important.

And I think also the hiring issue that you mentioned is -- we have been, and every time the NRC comes up it's always we do talk about FTEs and what you're budgeted for and what you're using it for and how many people do you really have.

But you have gaps in talent. And so we've opened it up. So we're going to look at that as a measurable. Are you actually hiring into that? Is it successful? And so those are some of the things. But you know, I mean, I'd love to go to a ribbon-cutting. You know how we are, we love ribbon-cuttings. And so that would be.

CHAIRMAN WRIGHT: Yeah, thank you for that, because workforce is the big thing. And we have, you know, and one of the things that the agency is proud about is that we have intentionally been looking at FTE from when the renaissance didn't come the first time. And we have been shrinking down using attrition.

But if we go much further, we're going to actually be at a FTE number that goes down maybe to 1976 levels. That's okay if we've got the right people to do what we need.

SENATOR CAPITO: Right, right.

CHAIRMAN WRIGHT: And so you're right on we've got to identify what it is that we do. And they are on it, they got this, they got this.

I got one last question I wanted to ask you here. You

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know, we did our mission statement, and you know, safety's still safety. That's the number one thing.

But our mission statement talks about advancing for, you know, the common defense and security. We're to enable the safe and secure use and deployment of nuclear technologies and radioactive materials.

And we've got to do it, too, in a way that benefits society and the environment, right. That's the core of what our statement's about. So as an agency, we're kind of focusing on that now, we're trying to drive that home.

SENATOR CAPITO: Good.

CHAIRMAN WRIGHT: But we've got a lot of people in here who are vendors, they're utilities, they're from -- they're international. What is the role of the private government, the private people, the private people now that are not in government? What role do they have in the future of, you know, making sure we get this done efficiently?

SENATOR CAPITO: Well, I mean, they're the major drivers. I mean, I think these are major financial investments. Whether it's the equipment, whether it's the final construction, the variety of -- I don't want to say occupations. Skill sets I guess would be a better way to put it, that need to put all of this together are private sector folks.

And so you know, it's not just a supplier, it's a --

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it's somebody who's doing the technology, the drawings, the engineering, all of these kinds of things. I mean, the private sector has got to be there.

But the private sector, in my view, is not going to be there if they don't think they can get through a regulatory environment in a time-sensitive kind of -- I'm not saying rush. I'm saying in a time-sensitive period of time, because they begin to lose money and the return on investments leaves. And then that's when private sector's going to leave.

But I think everything that we do I think -- I mean, not everything. I believe that where government works best is when government works best with the private sector, with our educational institutions, and with our, obviously our regulatory body or the government. I will put us all in there together. It's got to be a partnership.

Because in order to be not one single entity can carry the load. And so I would encourage the private sector. I met -- I mean, I think every single aspect of the workforce is changing. And where do young people want to go? Do young people want to get into nuclear technology?

CHAIRMAN WRIGHT: They sure do.

SENATOR CAPITO: They better, because we need them. And with the way the technology's changing, a lot of other, you know, you look at something like the transportation.

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There's a commercial, I know I'm going on too long, but there was a commercial on TV that I thought was really good. It was where the guy said Mom, Dad, I got a new job. He'd just gotten his like MBA or something or his master's in engineering.

And they, Oh, good, Johnny got a job, this is great. What's your job? I'm going to work for the railroad. What? You know, because that sounds old. That sounds, you know, antiquated. It sounds irrelevant to -- you know, they're thinking he's going to be a nuclear scientist or something.

And so I think we have to make all of that, what AI's doing, what technologies, the new technologies are bringing to manufacturing, and nuclear's no different, to bring it to the younger folks to say this -- these are the exciting areas to come to.

And I know you're working with your educational institutions because that's critical. The only -- you have to go down even to the lower grades, to the middle schools, to the high schools. To sit, to talk about what you're doing.

And that's where I think private sector can really help. Because when the private sector goes into a school and shares one of their scientists or talks about the world can open up to you if you come into a career such as this. This is where I think the private sector can really play a good role as well.

CHAIRMAN WRIGHT: Right. Yeah, I'm really excited

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about the newer, the younger crowd coming into nuclear. It used to be they were -- a lot of people got in it for ideology or not, or didn't get in it because of ideology. And now it's more they see the benefit.

SENATOR CAPITO: Right.

CHAIRMAN WRIGHT: Right, and they want to be a part of that solution. They want it, literally, they want to save the world. That's what they want to do, right.

SENATOR CAPITO: Well, I think the younger people, if I could just say one other thing, I didn't mention it in my speech, is that nuclear, at least on the power sector of nuclear, is green.

And younger people want greener solutions and more environmentally sensitive solutions. And this is one of those major areas that I think nuclear can just drive a truck through, without the gasoline of course.

CHAIRMAN WRIGHT: Exactly, yeah. Well, so we're getting close to the end of time, and I want to thank you again for spending some time with us.

SENATOR CAPITO: Sure.

CHAIRMAN WRIGHT: And the quality time you spent with us.

SENATOR CAPITO: I enjoyed, it's great.

CHAIRMAN WRIGHT: And it's truly been an honor to have you here. I do have a gift for you that I'm going to give you.

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I made it.

SENATOR CAPITO: Oh, wow.

CHAIRMAN WRIGHT: I paid for it myself, so let me give you that.

SENATOR CAPITO: It's a medal declaring Clemson the -

-

CHAIRMAN WRIGHT: It's a Go Tigers hat. No.

SENATOR CAPITO: Oh, that's pretty good. Make Atoms Great Again. With the flag on the back. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN WRIGHT: Yeah. So ladies and gentlemen, please join me in thanking EPW Chairman Senator Shelley Moore Capito from the State of West by God Virginia.

SENATOR CAPITO: Yes, man.

CHAIRMAN WRIGHT: Thank you, Senator.

SENATOR CAPITO: Thank you. Enjoy the rest of it.

CHAIRMAN WRIGHT: Is that it? Yeah. I'm going to go ahead and I think we're at a break. Is that correct? So we'll see you in, is it 30 minutes, right, 10:30? All right, thank you.

(Whereupon, the above-entitled matter went off the record at 9:42 a.m.)

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