

U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON

ENERGY & NATURAL RESOURCES

SENATOR MARIA CANTWELL, *Ranking Member*



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Opening Statement Senator Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.) Hearing on Advanced Nuclear Technologies May 17, 2016

“Thank you, Madam Chair, for calling this hearing on advanced nuclear technology. I would also like to thank the panel for being here today and for their work in this important field. I think this group of witnesses will provide us with a comprehensive viewpoint needed to explore the current state of advanced nuclear technology in this country.

“Nuclear energy has provided nearly 20 percent of electrical generation in the United States over the past two decades and currently produces about 60 percent of America’s carbon-free electricity.

“But the 99 reactors licensed to operate today in the United States will not last forever. If nuclear power is to remain a part of our energy future, we need to develop and demonstrate the next generation of nuclear power plants – and for me, we also need to deal with the challenges of nuclear waste. We all need to deal with this, but this is something that is pressing every day for us in the state of Washington. The lack of a comprehensive set of solutions has hampered both commercial nuclear development, as well as our defense waste clean-up efforts in this country. Secretary Moniz has worked hard to break the log-jam, and I think this committee will ultimately play a key role in crafting a path forward on this very technically challenging issue.

“Meantime, we should also acknowledge that, although nuclear power has a record of operating safely and cost effectively, there is the potential for catastrophe as we have seen at Fukushima, Three Mile Island and Chernobyl.

“So if nuclear power is to have a future, the problems that have consistently plagued it in the past must be met with innovative and effective ideas. New designs must be safer, cheaper, more efficient and proliferation-resistant. In addition, we must have a credible licensing and regulatory system, so that nuclear power is not only safe, but accepted by the public. So transparency and open communication by industry and government is also important.

“The Department of Energy and private industry have been working to address these problems. There are several designs being considered here in the United States and globally that have promising features to address some of these longstanding issues, and I look forward to hearing from our witnesses here today on the specifics of these new technologies.



“Advanced nuclear may someday make a real contribution to advanced manufacturing in Washington state and the Northwest region. I’m pleased to have here today TerraPower, NuScale and the Idaho National Laboratory. The Pacific Northwest National Laboratory is also making important contributions in advanced nuclear development.

“The Northwest has proven to be an exciting place for the development of advanced nuclear technology. NuScale, Energy Northwest and Utah Associated Municipal Power Systems are all partnering to construct and operate the country’s first small modular reactor.

“In addition, TerraPower and the China National Nuclear Corporation signed a memorandum of understanding to develop TerraPower’s travelling wave reactor.

“It’s clear that making a dent in global carbon emissions will require cooperation between the United States and China, which may prove to be the world’s biggest market, as well, for some of these energy solutions.

“TerraPower’s engagement with China is an important example being set for advanced reactor technologies. In order to be a part of the new wave of nuclear energy, the United States must be a strong exporter of advanced, proliferation-resistant nuclear materials and technology.

“The advancement of nuclear technology is an important pathway for moving the global community away from carbon emitting technologies. It is vital that the United States continue to lead the world in clean energy, and nuclear may prove to be a key a component in this effort.

“So again, I thank the chair for holding this important hearing, and I look forward to hearing from our witnesses.”

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