

UNITED STATES

NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

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ALL EMPLOYEES MEETING WITH COMMISSIONERS

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WEDNESDAY,

OCTOBER 21, 2020

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The Commission met via Videoconference, at 1:00 p.m.

EDT, Kristine L. Svinicki, Chairman, presiding.

COMMISSION MEMBERS:

KRISTINE L. SVINICKI, Chairman

JEFF BARAN, Commissioner

ANNIE CAPUTO, Commissioner

DAVID A. WRIGHT, Commissioner

CHRISTOPHER T. HANSON, Commissioner

ALSO PRESENT:

ANNETTE VIETTI-COOK, Secretary of the Commission

MARIAN ZOBLER, General Counsel

NRC STAFF:

MARGARET DOANE, Executive Director for Operations

DANIEL DORMAN, Deputy Executive Director for Reactor

and Preparedness Programs

GINA DAVIS, Office of Nuclear Material Safety and Safeguards

TIA HAYNES, Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer

ALSO PRESENT:

SHERYL SANCHEZ, National Treasury Employees Union

P R O C E E D I N G S

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1:02 p.m.

CHAIRMAN SVINICKI: Well, good afternoon, everyone, and welcome. Welcome back to some of us who are in this room this morning. I am calling to order a truly unique NRC all staff, all employee meeting, and we have always had to rely upon virtual participation to some extent in this meeting, but this year we are relying on almost exclusively virtual participation of NRC staff.

And, of course, this is also a public meeting of our Commission, so other interested members of the public are able to tune in as well and we will hear from all commissioners. We will mostly take Q&A during this meeting, but we will be led off by our Executive Director for Operations Margie Doane.

MS. DOANE: Okay, thank you, Chairman Svinicki. Good afternoon. Welcome to the 29th annual all hands meeting of staff and Commission. This is a public meeting, so I'd like to also welcome any members of the public and media who might be joining us today.

This is the first of a kind annual all hands meeting with the Commission because it is being brought to staff entirely virtually. Needless to say, I'm appreciative we have the necessary technologies that enable us to connect virtually and an NRC workforce that is adaptable and willing to employ these tools so that we can carry on the tradition of holding this highly anticipated event. I'd like to extend a special thanks to the members of the Commission for their continued support of this important meeting and for taking the time to discuss topics that are of great interest to all of us. Despite the change in how meetings are being held, the purpose remains the same as

1 in prior years. It's intended to be an opportunity for communication between
2 the Commission and the staff and for the members of the Commission to share
3 their perspectives on NRC's accomplishments and challenges.

4 The meeting will begin with the Chairman and each
5 Commissioner providing individual remarks. The remainder of the meeting is
6 reserved for employees to ask questions. This is a unique opportunity for
7 employees to interact directly with the Commission regarding agency policy
8 and strategy matters and I encourage you all to take advantage of it.

9 And now for a bit of logistics before we begin, NRC
10 employees have the ability to submit a question via the link located on the
11 NRC internal web page. Please click the link in the NRC banner located on
12 the NRC's internal website and submit your questions using the form. NRC
13 employees can submit questions anytime during the meeting until 2:45 p.m.

14 We will be reading from the list of questions as time permits
15 during the question and answer period. Please note that this meeting will be
16 recorded and is closed captioned.

17 Meetings like this would not be possible without the help of
18 our dedicated volunteers, so I'd like to recognize Gina Davis from the Office
19 of Nuclear Material Safety and Safeguards. She's the vice president of the
20 NRC's Toastmaster Club and she will read the questions for the Commission.
21 Alternating reading questions is Tia Haynes from the Office of Chief Human
22 Capital Officer.

23 Additionally, I'd like to thank the employees from various
24 offices across the NRC who helped organize this meeting. We sincerely
25 appreciate your planning efforts to provide the necessary technical and

1 logistical support to allow us to come together virtually today.

2 In particular, I would like to thank Maria Arribas-Colon of my
3 staff who has worked tirelessly to make this meeting a success. Finally, I'd
4 like to recognize Ms. Sheryl Sanchez, president of NRC's chapter of the
5 National Treasury Employees Union who is also joining us virtually today.
6 Following the Commission's remarks and the question and answer period, Ms.
7 Sanchez will have the opportunity to provide remarks.

8 Now without further delay, I'll turn the meeting over to you,
9 Chairman Svinicki.

10 CHAIRMAN SVINICKI: Thanks, Margie.

11 Again, my thanks to Gina and Tia who are going to help us have a
12 flawless Q&A portion here. Thank you so much, both of you, for volunteering
13 to do that. And also we have in the very limited staff in the room we have Mr.
14 Dave Nelson.

15 And I want to begin just by saying that, you know, the
16 Commission's range of options for this meeting or conducting our public
17 meetings, really, everything's ridden on the backbone of the tremendous kind
18 of foresight that the Office of CIO has had at NRC and there's rarely a workday
19 that goes by since the public health emergency that I haven't awoken and
20 been really grateful for the fact that we have so much capacity as NRC at our
21 command in terms of the tools that were always important but now are so
22 essential to our ability to function in this environment.

23 And I know all my colleagues will be extremely eloquent, but
24 it's my practice I've generally have not had a prepared formal statement for
25 this gathering. I do view it very much as a dialogue with the NRC staff. It
26 sure feels different this year because we used to look out at a sea of, at a

1 minimum, hundreds, probably topping a thousand in any given year, of our
2 NRC family that would have been over at the Marriott diagonally across the
3 street.

4 For those of you in the Regions and the TTC, this isn't so
5 different for you. Maybe you always opted to view it and participate remotely.
6 But it does feel to me like a conversation and I hope it will be, and again we've
7 tried to provide the tools so that people can get their questions in advance.

8 I was particularly well-served this year that I don't generally
9 write out a written statement because I think I've got to be the same as most
10 of the folks listening to me right now that, you know, 2020, how does one really
11 talk about the year 2020? And I think at this point in October, the menu of
12 adjectives that we're supposed to be able to be using to describe these
13 experiences I just candidly admit, you know, to be completely caught off guard.

14 Of course, the ironic thing is that the NRC actually has
15 pandemic planning as part of both our own continuity of operations and we do
16 conduct oversight of this particular hazard or area of challenge for our
17 licensees in the regulated community. But I think that knowing it's out there
18 in the broad universe of things that could happen feels really, really different
19 from having it happen.

20 And Sheryl's been kind enough to speak at the end of this
21 meeting, but I'm going to reference something she said as she spoke closing
22 our Commission meeting this morning as she said -- and I apologize, Sheryl,
23 because I didn't write it down exactly. I just agreed so much with the
24 sentiment, which is that it is possible for NRC to come through these
25 experiences and be stronger.

26 And I don't think it's just some kind of strange optimism that

1 I need to adopt to get me through. I really believe that because we are this
2 far into this experience and you just see our ability to move forward and I know
3 it's a strain, you know, on everybody.

4 And when I was looking at Dave Nelson and talking about
5 getting up every workday and being so glad, I also kind of, you know, harness
6 myself to that gosh darn laptop that you all thought to provide to all of us and
7 I'm like, another COVID day begins.

8 So I know that we're all dealing with that and there are many
9 of you challenged with home stressors that are even more significant, you
10 know, dealing with family and the school reopening or not reopening and all
11 of that has been so complicated for everybody, but I don't just say it because
12 I want to kind of espouse some sort of cheerleading capacity. I get an
13 opportunity to be on routine engagements with others in my role in other
14 departments and agencies and I walk away from those thinking that, you
15 know, I would tritely say we're lucky at NRC. But it's not luck, it's a lot of
16 things. It's the great kind of unity of purpose that we have that we are very
17 meticulous and careful and thoughtful systematic people that serves you well
18 and we know this from those of us who do event response.

19 We know that that's the mindset to bring where there's this much
20 uncertainty and very little that you know for sure. And I think it's easy to sit
21 here in October and dismiss or forget about the overwhelming suffocating
22 uncertainty early in this. Although it has been a great tragedy and lives lost,
23 there are certainly contagion vectors that are much more virulent that we could
24 have, you know, in early days, I'm sure many of us got up and thought how
25 depending on how rapidly this might progress what might we be called to do
26 in two weeks from now and two months from now.

1 And so when I look at where we are, there were some
2 fortuitous elements that made it more of a long duration but not a rapid
3 catastrophic type of event, which again a lot of us have to think about those
4 low probability events as part of the work we do here at NRC and I'm sure we
5 brought a lot of that really level-headed thinking in how we dealt with things.

6 But I think we have a strong culture. We're very, very
7 focused on our culture because of transformation. We were talking about it
8 this morning, but when you add in the other events in this country maybe
9 amplified by the public health emergency and how difficult times were for so
10 many of us that we had the racial justice issues and the other things that are
11 causing us to do a lot of really painful reflection.

12 So here we are. We're having to reflect professionally and
13 now we're reflecting as a society and thinking about, you know, how do we
14 move forward from all this? But I, again, Sheryl said it this morning. But it
15 has been, after some of the early fog lifted, consistently my view is that NRC
16 is coming through this and it's bringing all the right elements of our culture and
17 our capacity to the fore. We are getting done the mission that the American
18 people count on us to do.

19 And we would have having not been able to do that we could
20 have contributed to further national unease, so our ability to continue to meet
21 our mission is something that takes one less concern off the American public's
22 mind.

23 So, you know, on behalf of the Commission, thank you all
24 for that. But it is turning into a long duration event, so the next thing your
25 mind goes to is okay, you know, there is promising -- I am an optimist on the
26 vaccine just because so much resource has been put into that. There are

1 levels of global collaboration that I don't think have ever occurred for big
2 pharma and for the development of something like this, so I think there's a lot
3 of reason for hope there.

4 It's going to get complicated though, because, you know,
5 some may get some approval to be rolled out but others will emerge that will
6 have better efficacy for certain subsectors of the population. You may be
7 told, well, get this vaccine, and before you get the second dose they'll be like,
8 oh, this other one is now really what we would have someone in your health
9 situation get. So there's going to be a lot to deal with.

10 And I, this isn't pessimism, but I, you know, what I'm
11 preparing for in my mind is that 2021 will look a lot like the stabilized situation
12 that we're sitting in here today and that's not necessarily a bad thing, you
13 know, we're coming through it with strength. I think we're getting, you know,
14 better at it. It's impacting us in the moment less than it did because we have
15 more experience to reflect on in getting through the events that we're facing
16 now.

17 But again, I think this dialogue is important. I'm sorry that
18 I'm not looking out, you know, at people or chatting with them in the Marriott
19 ballroom before or after, but I'm looking forward to just at least having this little
20 toehold for 2020. We did not let 2020 take this meeting away.

21 And so with that I'll stop talking and I will recognize
22 Commissioner Baran.

23 COMMISSIONER BARAN: Well, thank you. Welcome
24 everyone. It's great to be here today with my colleagues for this virtual all
25 employees meeting. I appreciate all of you taking the time to join us remotely.
26 This annual meeting is a great opportunity for you to share your thoughts

1 about how things are going at the agency and ask the questions you have on
2 your mind.

3 As the Chairman talked about this, this has obviously been
4 a very challenging year with the pandemic and I'm really proud of the way you
5 all have handled it. If you would have told me in February that the agency
6 would function well with almost everyone teleworking at the same time, I don't
7 think I would have believed it.

8 I know telework can be isolating for some. For those of us
9 with kids at home it can be the exact opposite. Either way, I know it can be
10 a little overwhelming at times. But, overall, with the right IT in place we've
11 been able to get our work done for the last seven months while keeping our
12 staff safe and that is a significant accomplishment.

13 The compass balance for NRC to strike has been on
14 inspections. For the first few months of the pandemic NRC was conducting
15 very few in-person safety and security inspections. At most nuclear power
16 plants our resident inspectors were onsite far less than usual and there were
17 almost no regional team inspections happening. I appreciate that the staff is
18 focused on getting the resident inspectors back on site more frequently and
19 on generally getting back to in-person safety inspections.

20 The staff set a goal of meeting the minimum samples for the
21 reactor oversight process baseline inspections this year and it looks like we
22 are mostly on track to meet that important goal. Based on my conversations
23 with NRC inspectors and managers, I think that there's a renewed recognition
24 of the value of in-person safety and security inspections. Whether it's the
25 ability to walk down safety-related equipment, talk informally with plant
26 employees, observe operations firsthand, or the intangible but very real effect

1 of having inspectors with an NRC hard hat visible around the plant. It's a
2 reminder that what we do really matters.

3 Our work is a team effort. Whether you're an inspector or
4 a project manager or an attorney or a contracting specialist or an
5 administrative assistant you're adding value every day, so thank you for the
6 work that you do. I look forward to hearing your thoughts and questions.

7 Thanks, Chairman.

8 CHAIRMAN SVINICKI: Thank you, Commissioner Baran.

9 Commissioner Caputo?

10 COMMISSIONER CAPUTO: I'd like to start by echoing
11 something that Margie said and just thanks to all the staff who worked hard to
12 make this meeting possible under unusual circumstances. It's sad not to be
13 able to look out and see the faces of everyone and have perhaps a more
14 personal meeting, but thanks for the upbeat attitudes and getting the jobs done
15 by the unusual circumstances.

16 I also sincerely want to applaud all agency staff for the
17 continued dedication and agility. There is no precedent for the nature of how
18 the agency has been forced to function this year, but thanks to everyone for
19 learning how to work virtually this year and still execute our safety and security
20 mission. That's an amazing accomplishment that I think everyone should
21 take a great deal of pride in.

22 As a Commission we have embraced a new colleague this
23 year -- welcome, again -- and we also continue to deal with important policy
24 issues and adjudicatory decisions. So given the unusual circumstances and,
25 you know, a lot going on, there are a lot of dedicated people who are
26 committed to helping us get our work done. And sometimes you might think

1 it goes unnoticed, but it is noticed and it's very much appreciated.

2 But, finally, I also want to thank those who couldn't, whose
3 work couldn't all be done virtually -- our resident inspectors, our HOOs, ILTAB,
4 right down to contract folk like security officers and the cleaning staff -- they
5 are all still coming to work and doing their jobs whether the rest of us are in
6 our buildings or not.

7 And my hat's off to them, because given, certainly, the
8 greater uncertainty at the beginning that the Chairman mentioned there is not
9 just risk to them but, certainly, a reason for concern and, you know, fear at just
10 embarking on coming into these buildings to do their work and I think that's to
11 be commended.

12 One thing that's certainly a result of the upheaval that we've
13 gone through this year is how I think in many ways just the nature of the
14 situation has really propelled transformation and change just by the nature of
15 it. Whether it's, you know, learning to do more things virtually, learning to
16 expand our IT abilities to still accomplish our mission, and hopefully also
17 looking ahead at how the things that we have learned to do in a pinch because
18 we had to, may actually be very welcome ways of executing our work in the
19 future and extending people's capabilities and driving some efficiencies and
20 hopefully just improving how we conduct work, so that I actually welcome.

21 So like the Chairman said, who could have predicted the
22 year that we have in 2020, but my hat's off to everyone and together, you
23 know, I look forward to fastening our seatbelts and looking forward to 2021
24 and what it might throw at us for a sequel. Thank you.

25 CHAIRMAN SVINICKI: Thank you, Commissioner Caputo.
26 Next, we'll hear from Commissioner Wright.

1 COMMISSIONER WRIGHT: Thank you, Chairman. So
2 no one wishes we could be together more than me, in person, but I'm still very
3 glad that we're able to have this important meeting even though it's virtual.

4 Commissioner Baran and I were talking about it coming
5 down the elevator, you know, how different it is to be sitting around a table
6 and not actually being able to go out in the crowd and shake hands and say
7 hello like we're used to doing, and hopefully we can get back to that soon.

8 I share Commissioner Caputo's thanks to the essential
9 employees that are here and having to show up every day regardless, and,
10 you know, we do -- they mean the world to us in how we operate our agency
11 and so thank you for that, that shout out to them. And to SECY and Admin
12 and OCIO and everyone else who's helped put this together, thank you for
13 your efforts. This is an important meeting and you've been behind the scenes
14 making it work as you have every other meeting that we've had, so thank you.

15 So -- and today is just another example of how all of you,
16 the agency as a whole, have successfully adapted to a changed and a still
17 changing environment. And, myself, I've felt a little bit like an outsider in a
18 way because I've had to be working from South Carolina since mid-March,
19 you know, I didn't know the day after my confirmation hearing when I drove
20 out of this parking lot I wouldn't be back for, what was it, seven months.

21 So I don't think any of us were prepared for that and if I'd
22 have known it, I'd have taken a little bit of time to print some stuff out because
23 I sure miss my printer. I miss my printer and I don't think I'm alone there. So
24 we need to work on that. What's not surprising though is how well things
25 have gone since. You know, you've transitioned quickly and we've adapted
26 to everything remote wise that we probably at another time would not thought

1 have been as possible. We've proved that it is.

2 And you all have had to deal with everything from
3 graduations, child care, births of babies, weddings, you name it, you know,
4 sicknesses at home, loss of loved ones, unfortunately, and other challenges
5 and, you know, we've all had to go through it as a family and as a team and,
6 you know, our thoughts and prayers are with you as you're trying to get your
7 work done and we want to be there to help support you, to help motivate you
8 and keep you going forward.

9 So if you maintain the mission, if you follow the principles of
10 good regulation, you've leveraged the use of new technologies and new
11 platforms and you've just continued to make sure that we're running
12 effectively. And I'm very grateful and I'm a fan, a big fan, and so thank you
13 for what you do.

14 And, you know, we have Commissioner Hanson as well.
15 We now have five, and welcome to your first all employees. I look forward to
16 the time when you can be in the big building over there with everybody, you'll
17 really enjoy that. And you've shown that you fit in here and I really appreciate
18 getting to know you and working with your staff and, you know, let us know
19 what we can do further to help you as well as with my other colleagues.

20 So with that, Chairman, thank you.

21 CHAIRMAN SVINICKI: Thank you, Commissioner Wright.

22 With that kind words and kind welcome, let us now
23 recognize Commissioner Hanson. Welcome.

24 COMMISSIONER HANSON: Thank you, Chairman
25 Svinicki. Thanks, everybody, for joining us today. I mean it's, I'm really
26 pleased to be here at the first of what I hope are several of these all employee

1 meetings. And I, really, I look forward to the questions and to the back and
2 forth.

3 I mean, there really has been a through-line since the
4 beginning of the public health emergency, the ongoing transformation I've
5 heard, so I think really enabled the agency to adapt relatively quickly. And,
6 you know, I mean, I certainly saw that when I came on board in June and was
7 sworn in, right. I mean how seamless that was in a way, right, to come in on
8 the day and to get handed a laptop and three boxes of paper from Annette
9 and then get sent right back out the door. And I don't think I was back in the
10 building again for probably another month or six weeks.

11 And, you know, since that time, with the help of the staff and
12 the infrastructure and the willingness to change and adapt that the people
13 have had, you know, I've felt enormously welcome and feeling like I've been
14 modestly productive in this time too, and I just want to really appreciate my, or
15 extend my appreciation to the staff for everything that's gone so well.

16 At various points in my career I've interacted with NRC staff
17 and kind of admired you all from afar and some of you have heard me say
18 this, but I'm incredibly honored and it's a real privilege and a blessing to be
19 here among you. So, you know, I think, well, I think we'll leave it there
20 because I'd really like to hear from the staff. So thanks, everybody.

21 CHAIRMAN SVINICKI: Okay. Well, thank you very
22 much, Commissioner Hanson.

23 And so as Margie indicated, we have Gina and Tia and they
24 have said that they will alternate but they're going to keep track of the
25 alternating, so -- and the one question that I didn't ask beforehand is who will
26 start? Gina will start. Okay. So we will please go ahead and read the first

1 question.

2 MS. DAVIS: Okay. The first question is on agency
3 organizational structure. Staff would like to know how the Commission
4 envisions the agency organizational structure in five years, especially the
5 resident inspector organizational structure.

6 CHAIRMAN SVINICKI: Okay. There is a really broad
7 scope in that question. And I should have said to my colleagues that I will go
8 ahead and share some thoughts on this one first, but it does not and, actually,
9 I think works nicer if you hear a question that you particularly like, to get the
10 ball rolling please just give me a little hi sign and I will go ahead and recognize
11 you so that and then it's nice that we get to react to each other's remarks. So
12 if I start them all it gets a little tedious, and I'm the one saying that, so I can
13 say it.

14 The organizational structure of NRC is interesting. Some
15 of it is actually laid out in statute, so we have what I think of as the original
16 legacy offices. It doesn't mean that you can't create a new reactors and then
17 eventually decide that that, you know, given the workload full spec in
18 somewhere else. It's nice that we have as an organization the flexibility to
19 say what is the structure that serves us well right now.

20 And then I think on the corporate side, you know, what we
21 have is similar to the kind of functional groupings that a lot of large
22 organizations would have. So although we may have a legal flexibility to
23 modify there, in general, I think that we are aligned with how others would put,
24 you know, in a CFO office or have procurement being worked out of this part
25 of your administrative function.

26 So I don't envision too much differences there. I do think

1 that what excites me about transformation is an ability to look at things like the
2 resident inspector program. I'm not suggesting that it needs a refresh. The
3 fundamentals of the resident inspector program are enduring and strong and
4 I don't see it ever being entirely different than what it is today.

5 But I think this country has decided that an onsite presence
6 at nuclear power plants is something that the American public has an
7 expectation of that, so that's what I would call a foundational element of a
8 program that is unlikely to change going forward. But we will be different
9 based on these COVID experiences.

10 The world changes and modernized, I think, the notion of,
11 you know, a trailing spouse who in most cases historically would have been
12 the wife of the inspector, you know, being willing not having her own career
13 and being willing to move every few years from site to site, programs like
14 resident inspector programs or the diplomatic corps at the State Department
15 that have to come to terms with giving conditions of work that make it continue
16 to be a really attractive type of job that people want to be in that doesn't impact
17 their families in adverse ways. And so within that space I'm excited that if we
18 looked in a transformative sense at some of the conditions of work in terms of
19 work for inspectors and not just resident inspectors, inspector function,
20 generally, I'm sure that there's things that we would acknowledge that maybe,
21 hey, we should provide this flexibility or we should refresh the program in this
22 way. And I'll stop there.

23 Commissioner Baran?

24 COMMISSIONER BARAN: I don't have too much to add.
25 I think I agree with everything the Chairman said there. The only thing I'd
26 mention which, you know, I think the residents are aware of is there has been

1 a working group looking at potential recommendations on recruitment and
2 retention and some of those. Not the foundational issues around the resident
3 inspector program, but really what can we do there to make it an appealing,
4 attractive position given that it's so important to the agency.

5 That working group, I think, is, you know, set to report pretty
6 soon and I look forward to hearing the recommendations and seeing if there
7 is more we can do there to provide, you know, the incentives that make it really
8 appealing to be a resident inspector or senior resident inspector because it's
9 just so crucial that work to our overall mission.

10 CHAIRMAN SVINICKI: Commissioner Wright?

11 COMMISSIONER WRIGHT: Thank you, Chair.

12 I'm just going to build off that just a little bit because I appreciate your
13 comments and I agree with them and Commissioner Baran as well.

14 We also need to recognize those financial impacts, you
15 know, the tax consequences are things that, you know, are upside down and
16 I don't know that we can do that through a paper. You know, there's got to
17 be another way to do that and, you know, we need to be, we need to
18 acknowledge that and search however we can. If we need to group with other
19 agencies to look at this or, you know, get somebody to be a champion up on
20 the Hill, that's just something we need to look at as well.

21 CHAIRMAN SVINICKI: Thank you.

22 Commissioner Caputo?

23 COMMISSIONER CAPUTO: This is one issue where I
24 think I have a fair amount of hope for these modern technology to the extent
25 that we are able to see through IT that residents can have remote access to
26 information or ways that can help them speed the nature of the work that

1 they've got to do for baseline inspections.

2 I wonder if that doesn't also create some room in their
3 schedule to maybe expand their skill set and perhaps take on some of the
4 burden from some of the regional offices just who, you know, I could see
5 depending on the nature how this technology can be employed, helping them
6 maybe broaden their expertise and their skill sets and maybe the nature of the
7 job shifting a bit in that way.

8 But, obviously, as the Chairman said, the presence onsite, I
9 think, is crucial and it's vital work that they are doing every day. But that's
10 one tweak in addition to what David said that I could see in the future.

11 CHAIRMAN SVINICKI: Thank you.

12 Tia, would you read the next question?

13 MS. HAYNES: The next question is on transformation
14 activities. What's the Commission's view on how the employee can benefit
15 from the efforts on transformation and can the Commission describe what
16 actions have or are being taken to ensure the vision reflects the staff's views?

17 CHAIRMAN SVINICKI: I'm not -- staff's views. Well, I'll
18 just get some thoughts started. Such a broad topic I imagine everyone will
19 have something to say about it.

20 I think that I view transformation through the prism of being
21 here for Project AIM and, you know, it started out with a set of objectives. But
22 as you learn things then in a healthy continuous improvement environment
23 you begin to say, well, let's shift to look at this or maybe that area's not fruitful
24 and we're going to modify.

25 And I see transformation has also evolved quite a bit since
26 under the leadership of EDO Victor McCree and there was a tasking and the

1 analyst, Dan Dorman, I'm looking at him, who was very -- the people in this
2 room have to serve as surrogates for like hundreds of other people when I
3 look at you.

4 But Dan and many others, you know, were here and
5 involved in looking at things under that time period. And what we decided,
6 we took, that took us to, you know, part of the way through looking at
7 modernizing maybe some things would benefit from some reexamination
8 depending on how events had intervened. And when we embarked on
9 transformation, which again was, I would say, very much staff-led in the sense
10 that the EDO at the time, Victor McCree, again pulling together a group to look
11 kind of cross-functionally at what we might do, I'll say the same thing I said at
12 the time which is transformation is such a big word that carries so much weight
13 that I worried a little bit about picking that word.

14 But if you just kind of consider it to be a further evolution,
15 NRC has always been kind of a lessons learned, continuous improvement
16 organization. Project AIM was an element of that that had a very fiscal focus.
17 I'm not trying to pretend that that was different than it was, but transformation
18 is about kind of all of the elements of, you know, who we are, what we do, how
19 do we achieve those objectives.

20 And the reason that I would hope that staff would find it
21 something that they want to engage in is that it is an opportunity to design the
22 NRC that you're coming to work at every day and that, you know, hopefully
23 you want to be coming to work five years from now or ten years from now and
24 be a part of that journey.

25 I think it goes beyond saying we welcome suggestions into
26 this transformation event starting off with Margie's idea of the jam. I mean

1 how much more direct can you make an initiative than to say we're just going
2 to dialogue for two and a half days. I mean that is meant to be a
3 demonstration that there is not some preconceived game plan.

4 And I've watched it every step, taking the jam results,
5 synthesizing those, looking at the various initiatives then maybe deciding
6 priority initiatives. I hope I haven't seen it wrong, but it has appeared to me
7 that at every stage it has been a feedback loop from the staff to other staff
8 working on these initiatives. And for that very reason I hope it looks different
9 a year from now. It needs to. That would be the healthiest thing for it.

10 And so those are just some thoughts kind of about where I
11 think we are and where we're going and I don't know that it's intended to be a
12 thing that it's limited in scope. It's ten tasks and when they're done, they're in
13 the tracking system and then it's over, I don't see it that way.

14 Commissioner Baran?

15 COMMISSIONER BARAN: Yeah, I think, you know, there
16 are several initiatives going on I think that can be really beneficial to staff.
17 One of them is something we alluded to or talked about earlier which is all the
18 IT, you know, that's just been a really, a big shift in the last few years.

19 And I think the Chairman, I don't know if you used the word
20 "prescient," but I think it really was. You know, a couple years back we
21 moved to all of these laptops and everything and it's, I mean it's just been huge
22 for us as an agency to be effective. So there's the IT piece. I don't know if
23 we always think of that, you know, under the rubric of transformation, but I
24 think that's just been really important and it's been a big change in the last few
25 years.

26 Another one of the areas I would think of is strategic

1 workforce planning which we talked about this morning. I mean I think the
2 vision for that is really positive for employees, which is the ability to see, you
3 know, where does the agency think we're going to have our future needs in
4 terms of skill sets and what's the path to attaining those skills and putting
5 yourself as an employee in a position to take that next spot whether it's a
6 rotation or a promotion, so -- and that's really coming along. I felt good about
7 that this morning, the kind of progress that's been made in that area. And the
8 ability just to kind of access that information online now, I think, is very, very
9 good.

10 You know, something that is still kind of working its way
11 through to fruition but I think can be a real value to staff is just kind of the
12 streamlining of some our internal processes, and mostly I'm thinking about the
13 concurrence process there. I know that's been a frustration for a lot of people
14 for many years and there's an effort now to really look at that. What should
15 a concurrence process look like so that everyone knows what their, you know,
16 role and responsibility is as part of that and also, you know, we can get through
17 work in a timely way?

18 You know, I know having gotten papers you sometimes see
19 the concurrence chain and you're like, wow, you know, to go from that first
20 person to the last person took 15 months or 8 months or whatever it took, and
21 I would imagine, you know, if you're the first person on that chain that's going
22 to be a little frustrating. And so I think, you know, that's something that could
23 be really productive.

24 And then, you know, another area that Margie's emphasized
25 and that I have agreed with in the very beginning is to make sure very early in
26 the discussions of like policy questions or potential changes to oversight or

1 substantive standards that we get all the different issue viewpoints figured out
2 early on, have all those aired so that we know going in where are the different
3 staff on the different issues.

4 Factor that in very early in the process rather than having a
5 recommendation and months and months and months later folks come in
6 towards the end and that's the first time they get their opportunity to say, wait
7 a minute, I'm concerned about this. Let's hear those voices very early on
8 because you're going to just have a much better product and a much better
9 decision if we do that. So I've been very supportive of that effort.

10 And there has been a trend. We've talked about this, I
11 think, in prior years at these meetings of seeing more and more of those
12 alternative staff views in the papers that come up to us, which I think is just
13 super valuable. I really benefit from that when there's that attachment.

14 And it's not always, you know, it's not always a formal
15 nonconcurrence. It's not always a formal differing professional opinion. It
16 can just be the staff talking about, well, we weren't unanimous on this as a
17 staff. There are some folks who have a different view and here's that view
18 and here's why they would maybe recommend something else than what the
19 overall staff is recommending.

20 So I think those are all really valuable for the agency, but I
21 hope also valuable to individual employees. And I'll just stop by saying
22 because I know this is a little bit scattered, you know, to the extent we have
23 thought within transformation or the staff's thought in transformation about
24 more substantive changes, I do think it's just so important to make sure we're
25 hearing all those views, the regions and headquarters, hear all the views and
26 make sure we're taking them into consideration before any kind of

1 recommendation is made to the Commission. Thanks.

2 CHAIRMAN SVINICKI: Commissioner Caputo?

3 COMMISSIONER CAPUTO: I think one of the things that
4 I like about transformation, which the Chairman pointed out, is by using that
5 word and having a goal of a modern risk-informed regulator it's a very, it's a
6 broad goal and there are initiatives that support that and there are various
7 teams and working groups, but the scope can really be driven by what the
8 staff see need to change.

9 And so rather than having a prescriptive, these ten things
10 and we need these staff doing this and these staff doing that, it's not, this is
11 not prescriptive. This is if you see a need for change and there's something
12 that excites you and something that you are energized about and feel you can
13 contribute to, there's an opportunity.

14 As Margie has stated, you know, over and over, 400 people
15 have submitted ideas for innovative changes. And, you know, and I think
16 that's a wonderful statement about how this is really intended to be an
17 opportunity for the staff themselves to change the agency in ways that they
18 think it needs to change to support that goal of being a modern, risk-informed
19 regulator.

20 So to that extent that may create a little confusion for staff
21 who may prefer to be told here is what you can do to support such and such,
22 but I hope there's also room for a lot of creativity and innovation by people
23 deciding in what ways they want to contribute. So I appreciate that and
24 certainly the staff's efforts to contribute so far.

25 CHAIRMAN SVINICKI: Thank you.

26 Commissioner Wright?

1 COMMISSIONER WRIGHT: Thank you. So I agree with
2 your comments, and your comments too, yours as well. I mean
3 transformation for me, I kind of wish we had chosen maybe a different word
4 because it's not the same to every area of the agency. It's just not. You
5 know, we're evolving, we're morphing, we're changing, we're adapting, we're
6 learning how to be nimble, you know, and responsive. So, but all of that is
7 transformative, so I guess that's why we use it. I agree with the use of IT.
8 We're doing it different. We're doing it, you know, we've been very fortunate
9 that we got on top of this early, that they had the foresight to do this when they
10 did. That's probably been as transformative for us today as anything else has
11 been.

12 You know, we've got EMBARK. We've got areas of this
13 agency that really have, are tackling, you know, the ideas that are being
14 brought in and how they're using that data analytics, information that we've
15 had forever that's not been able to be used the way it is today and to build
16 platforms and dashboards that they're able to do now, and that's going to
17 permeate this entire agency. You know, new ways of using things more
18 effectively to provide and meet our mission, you know, which is to provide
19 reasonable assurance of adequate protection.

20 So I'm excited with what I see. Not every area of the
21 agency's, you know, where the other ones are at, but they're all pulling. And
22 to quote who's the coach from, I guess, in Minnesota, they're all rowing the
23 boat in the same direction, and I like that. So.

24 CHAIRMAN SVINICKI: Okay. I think we are back to Gina
25 for the next question.

26 MS. DAVIS: Okay. The next question is in regards to

1 budget and transformation. The transformation effort has brought an
2 increased workload to our day-to-day work that is not really budgeted but we
3 are still required and accountable to continue performing our jobs with the
4 current guidance and processes, in addition to working on enhancing
5 guidance and processes in a very rapid manner to risk-inform our agencies
6 processes, streamline and et cetera.

7 It does not seem that we are accounting in our budget for all
8 this extra work and we continue to decrease our budgets and budget
9 formulation. What is the agency's plan to balance and right-size our
10 workforce with our mission critical work and our transformative work?

11 CHAIRMAN SVINICKI: Well, I'm happy to lead off. I will
12 say, number one, as I listen to the question, the saying, since we're talking
13 about sayings, the saying that came to mind is kind of trying to change the tire
14 on the car while you're driving down the highway.

15 And I think I have great sympathy with the kind of
16 presumption of the question, which is that processes that I'm using every day
17 I'm supposed to be evolving and modernizing at the same time and it is a
18 significant ask.

19 I have looked at a slightly different angle on it. It doesn't
20 remove the concern that was just expressed, but I have, to reflect on the last
21 question, been pleased to see that there are the kind of opportunities for
22 people to both nominate for change and to make suggestions about the
23 processes they use most intimately day to day to get their work done because
24 there are other models where a separate group would be set up to come up
25 with the suggestions of how to change something and they may or may not be
26 the type of people who struggle with the inefficiencies of that process on a

1 day-to-day basis. I think that, you know, budgeting as a concept is something
2 that in my time here, we've worked really hard. I'm looking at Commissioner
3 Hanson now because he recently arrived from a committee that has strong
4 views or a subcommittee that has strong views in the Senate of how well we
5 actually forecast our budget and execute our budget and then, you know, ask
6 for the next budget cycle.

7 I think that we have been asked to have a little more realism.
8 It's been particularly hard because when I joined, we were still growing in
9 budget and people and then we went through this contraction that we've -- and
10 we still appear to be in at the current time. Dynamic times are the hardest
11 time to get exquisitely accurate about your budget.

12 And so I have sat before Congress with others around this
13 table when we've been asked about our carryover, you know, you seem to
14 have excessive carryover, you routinely don't outlay. So that can make it a
15 very difficult environment to go to the Congress and say we need more. We
16 do attempt to execute our budget with the best-informed decision making that
17 we can have, but I think this area is always going to be in tension.

18 And I started out with the saying about changing the tire
19 while you're driving down the road. With that being said, there are a lot of
20 organizations that are cradles of innovation that we would look to in the U.S.
21 economy and say those people do it right. We've done benchmarking with
22 those groups.

23 And there is an element of evolving while you're still carrying
24 out your processes that even though it's a challenge is the most informed and
25 insightful way to evolve. The other option is to create a little think tank off to
26 the side where people aren't doing the work. They get out of step with what,

1 really, the organization needs.

2 So I hear the concern in the question. It's entirely valid. It
3 is a big ask organizationally and to the extent that people feel that they are
4 under unrealistic pressures, I would encourage them to be working with their
5 managers, their team leaders, their first line supervisors.

6 Sometimes I think that your supervisor may not realize that
7 you were wanting to carve out time to work on an improvement suggestion or
8 something like that. And so that communication which is, yes, made harder
9 due to our remote work situation, I think is maybe the first opportunity to kind
10 of work out a different agreement.

11 Commissioner Hanson, since I mentioned, see, I do that. I
12 mentioned you to draw you in like this. We're doing this going down the row
13 thing even though we're in a circle, but it's our old row. But please, because
14 you, no, it's very helpful because you're coming in bringing a fresher look at
15 this.

16 COMMISSIONER HANSON: Yeah. No, of course. I
17 mean, you know, I was thinking of the -- as you were speaking, Chairman
18 Svinicki, I was thinking of the Heisenberg principle a little bit too as another
19 analogy, right. We can locate the electron or we can tell the direction and
20 speed in which it's moving, but we can't do both.

21 And it is a little bit like that with our work and the
22 transformation efforts at the same time. I think we as a Commission have to
23 be cognizant in a way of the additional duties, right, that people are doing
24 things like moving licensing actions and, you know, other kind of day-to-day
25 work and transforming at the same time. That the billing and the workload
26 that we're seeing incorporates both of those things. Do we need a separate

1 charge code for transformation activities? You know, maybe, but also maybe
2 not, right, because those things that we do want to have that culture and build
3 that into the situation that we're in. I don't think it's a surprise to anybody that,
4 you know, we've got five commissioners and we've got five different views
5 about what the budget should be and what's a reasonable amount of carryover
6 and so on and so forth.

7 And we collectively have to incorporate the views, formal
8 and informal, of the Congress and of the Office of Management and Budget
9 and our licensees and others, but given the dynamism and kind of speaking
10 for myself, at some point there's a certain amount of change that has to
11 happen.

12 And then you kind of take a breather and you reevaluate and
13 you kind of check in with everybody and you take your pulse and you take the
14 organization's pulse and then you go back and you start up again in terms of
15 those things, and making sure that we haven't changed so much we've gotten
16 so far down the highway without the wheel fully attached to the car that we've,
17 you know, create a situation where you need to make some longer term
18 course corrections which we don't want to do. We want to be in tune with the
19 organization and understand what's going on at that line level. So, thank you.

20 CHAIRMAN SVINICKI: Commissioner Baran?

21 COMMISSIONER BARAN: You know, and just kind of
22 taking -- I agree with all that and, you know, segueing maybe a little bit more
23 on the budget piece in particular, you know, as I think of just our last few years,
24 our budget's come down a lot and starting with Project AIM and then
25 continuing in more recent efforts.

26 And I think, you know, Commissioner Hanson would know

1 this more than any of the others on the Commission, but I think we actually
2 have quite a bit of credibility now with appropriators on Congress. They know
3 we've done a good job, you know, getting our budget to a place where we're
4 asking for what we need. And to me though, that then becomes really a key
5 principle going forward. We can't let the impulse to constantly find a new
6 efficiency or reduce a resource get in the way of making sure we ask for what
7 we need. And I think that's kind of, you know, an underlying assumption of
8 the question, which is that hey, you know, I don't really have the budget I need
9 to do this. I need to do my day-to-day work and I want to do these other, you
10 know, transformational type efforts and do I have the budget to do everything
11 I need to do.

12 And I think as an agency we just have to make sure we are
13 submitting budget requests that get at all that and we're asking for what we
14 really need and we're not kind of self-censoring because, you know, we've
15 had a huge decrease in our budget in the short period of time. We've got to
16 make sure we don't overdo it and we make sure we are asking for what we
17 need and budgeting that way.

18 CHAIRMAN SVINICKI: Commissioner Caputo?

19 COMMISSIONER CAPUTO: One thing I wonder if staff is
20 aware, I know those of us at the Commission level, the leadership level, are
21 certainly perhaps more familiar with what goes on in the appropriations
22 process and how we budget. But for other staff out there, they might just see
23 our budget going down and wonder that we don't have enough in the way of
24 resources.

25 And so I think for those who aren't aware, you know, we
26 ended fiscal year 2019 with \$59 million that we didn't use, \$59 million in

1 carryover. So to the extent for staff that may be concerned about whether or
2 not we have the resources, we do tend to end years with a number of FTE,
3 usually over 150 slots that we haven't used and a serious amount of carryover,
4 59. I'm not sure what it is yet for fiscal '20. But we have been, I think, asking
5 for what we need but we're projecting two years in advance.

6 And in the meantime, the workload shrinks, plants shut
7 down, another four reactors will be gone next fall that we didn't budget for in
8 the time that we were making up the 2021 budget. So because of the fact
9 that we are budgeting two years in the future things do change and so I think
10 there's a fair amount of attention that gets paid toward making sure that we
11 are asking for enough and not shorting ourselves.

12 But to the extent that as things change, by the time the
13 budget cycle actually arrives and the money is spent, we end up with a fair
14 amount left over, so I hope that sort of eases some concerns on the part of
15 staff who may be worried that we don't actually have the resources we need.

16 CHAIRMAN SVINICKI: Thank you.

17 I think we are ready for the next question, Tia.

18 MS. HAYNES: The next question is focused around
19 COVID. Please talk about the plans, when and how, et cetera, the agency
20 may fully open the buildings and move away from telework flexibilities we have
21 now. For instance, will we have maximum telework until a vaccine is
22 released?

23 Will those who have had the vaccine be expected to come
24 back to work in the building? Will staff who have at-risk family at home be
25 able to continue with maximum telework even after a vaccine is widely
26 distributed?

1 CHAIRMAN SVINICKI: Thank you. And I appreciate that
2 question covers some different bases here. I'll just begin by saying that I
3 mentioned earlier throughout COVID I had an opportunity as Chairman here
4 to listen in on discussions where different agencies and leaders at my level or
5 senior levels throughout the federal government have kind of compared notes,
6 more frequently in early days, and now it's just settled in to a more stabilized
7 cadence. But I think that one of the things that again, I said I walk away from
8 those discussions and I'm grateful for a lot of the things. One thing I'm very
9 grateful for here is that Margie recognized so early on that we should get a
10 cross-functional taskforce put together.

11 That it should have senior awareness through Dan and that
12 we would make sure that we were doing really well-informed and
13 comprehensive decision making as we moved through the initial uncertainty,
14 then began to learn more as everyone is becoming more knowledgeable, both
15 about how to operate under the public health emergency on a sustained basis,
16 learning more about COVID-19 and the coronavirus family so there's medical
17 knowledge that we're gaining, we're using that to feed that in, and to have the
18 NRC offices have Admin, you know, focused on facilities. As Commissioner
19 Caputo has mentioned and others have talked about, we have had staff that
20 have needed to continue to operate from our facilities throughout COVID, so
21 what we've done is we've put that into this team. And it's one of the reasons
22 that we enjoy having a Commission is that people bring different questions to
23 the table and through that we have a good rigor in our consideration of issues
24 and decision making.

25 So that structure that was established early on and
26 continues to this day, they're not as active as they were in early days but we

1 still have that same very meticulous approach to answering as we go forward
2 the specific questions that were laid out just now when Tia read the subparts
3 of that question, you know, what will happen when this happens and what will
4 happen when that happen.

5 Always front of mind in the taskforce's work in the things that
6 bubbled up to the Commission has been a primary focus on the care and
7 safety of our employees. And if at bottom the question is meant to get a
8 reaction to is that going to change, my answer is I don't see that changing.

9 So we're learning a lot as NRC. We're learning a lot as a
10 country about how to move through something like this. I'm optimistic on
11 vaccines as I said, but the deployment is very complicated. It is going to be
12 logistically very challenging, and I think if you're like me you're increasingly
13 hearing in the media about when limited vaccine is available who will be the
14 priority recipients.

15 And as you would imagine, we need to have caregivers, we
16 need to have nursing home staff, medical providers, I think we all as a country,
17 as an agency, agree with that, agree with both. That has to be rolled out in a
18 priority fashion based on what medically makes sense and then it will simply
19 take time to have a ubiquitous availability.

20 So when I said I think 2021 might end up looking a lot like
21 the stabilized condition we're in now I can't give you exact answers on the
22 questions on flexibilities and things, but what I can say is NRC has set up a
23 really solid structure for constant reevaluation, like county by county.

24 We have folks who live as far as West Virginia and folks that
25 live three blocks away from, you know, White Flint. So it's been very
26 interesting jurisdictionally to kind of peer into the work of the task force and

1 the fidelity and granularity with which they are talking about these questions.

2 And we know that that kind of heterogeneous situation
3 applies to our workforce as well. We have people with school-age children.
4 We have people caregiving. We have people with medical considerations of
5 their own. We have people in age or health demographics that appear from
6 current research to be disproportionately at risk.

7 And I think we're going what I forecast not being able to
8 answer those set of questions with hard dates and metrics is, I see NRC taking
9 this approach that has benefited us, continuing it into the future, continuing to
10 look at these questions, continuing to give -- and how many times this morning
11 did each of us say that it's our people. We don't make widgets here and we
12 don't, you know, we're not making things of hand sanitizer or whatever. We'd
13 all be really, really wealthy if we were making Lysol wipes.

14 But what we do, it's our people that make possible what we
15 do and so we're going to have to give the requisite priority to making sure.
16 There's nothing to be gained from people in harm's way upon whom your
17 success depends, so we have to navigate the important mission for the
18 American people and making sure that the NRC staff and contractors and
19 others who help us get this done that we're giving the requisite care and
20 concern to their needs.

21 I don't know if anyone wants to -- Commissioner Hanson?

22 COMMISSIONER HANSON: Thank you, Chairman. I
23 mean, I think part of what I heard in the question was what you talked at the
24 opening of the meeting, right, that how to dispel this kind of oppressive cloud
25 of uncertainty that we're all living under and by saying well, gosh, if I can get
26 a little bit of certainty about what's going to happen when this happens and so

1 on and so forth, then that is kind of a relief.

2 And I think you hit exactly the right note that the safety and
3 the health and well-being of the staff is absolutely paramount, and I join you
4 in not being able to imagine a situation in which that would change.

5 CHAIRMAN SVINICKI: Commissioner Caputo?

6 COMMISSIONER CAPUTO: One of the things that I think
7 is hugely important in a situation where we're forced to dealing with this kind
8 of uncertainty is communication. And this was a conversation that Margie
9 and I had very early on, because if there isn't adequate communication it's
10 very easy for people to imagine that well, there must be secret conversations
11 happening at the leadership level that the rest of us aren't privy to. Gee, I
12 wonder what they're really talking about and what's really going on.

13 And so it becomes just invariably crucial for leadership to be
14 communicating. The more uncertainty there is, the more important it is. And
15 so even just say, you know, there's uncertainty. We don't know any more
16 today than we did yesterday, but we are tracking this and so on. I just think
17 the tools that Margie and her staff has used to reach out and communicate
18 with the staff, it looks impressive from where I am. You know, I hope it's been
19 useful and reassuring for the bulk of the staff to get these, you know, a lot of
20 times daily reports.

21 So I would just caution folks that just because you haven't
22 heard or you haven't seen an answer to a question, you know, there are a
23 couple reasons for that. One, the question may not be answered, and two,
24 just because it hasn't been answered doesn't mean that there aren't people
25 looking at it and trying to sort it out and trying to find out what that answer is
26 and that, you know, as soon as we have answers to get them out to people so

1 that they understand.

2 And I think just to the extent that we can communicate as
3 much as we can communicate at any point in time, I hope, is beneficial to staff.
4 There's a lot of uncertainty that we can't address and we can't answer yet, but
5 we can do our best to communicate everything we do know. And I do want
6 to commend the staff for that communications effort.

7 CHAIRMAN SVINICKI: Commissioner Wright?

8 COMMISSIONER WRIGHT: Thank you. I totally agree
9 and would like to build off of Commissioner Caputo's remarks.

10 Just to put you at ease out there, I have not heard anybody
11 at this table or in the leadership around here that has said we're going back at
12 any certain time.

13 They are -- you know, the most important thing is to keep
14 our people safe and to keep them healthy because I don't want to be around
15 you if you're like that, and I don't want you to be here if, you know, if it's not
16 time for you to be back here. And one thing that Margie said from the
17 beginning, and Mark was the same way when he was doing the more daily
18 routine stuff, and that is there will be plenty of notice given of what the plan is.
19 It will be well communicated.

20 So, I think the communication has been done very well, and
21 if we've had questions from our offices to Margie or to anybody else, they have
22 dug into it and got us, you know, got us the answer.

23 And, you know, so I feel very comfortable with where we are
24 as an agency right now and I don't see any pressure being applied for us to
25 return until the time is right.

26 COMMISSIONER BARAN: I don't think that leaves

1 anything for me to say. I think my colleagues completely covered it. And I
2 hope that for folks listening, that's, you know, collectively those answers are
3 reassuring to folks because they're meant to be and they should be.

4 Margie or Dan, I don't know if there's anything that we
5 missed collectively that you wanted to mention?

6 MR. DORMAN: This is Dan. I agree with everything that's
7 been said here. I think the one thing I would just expand upon, and as the
8 Chairman mentioned, the counties around headquarters.

9 The working group is continuously monitoring the counties
10 around all six of the locations where we have offices and the regions are
11 monitoring all of the locations where we're looking at sending inspectors out.

12 So, all of that is factoring into the decision making on
13 inspection planning over the coming weeks, as well as monitoring the situation
14 more globally around the NRC facilities and when any change may be
15 appropriate.

16 And then I would just reiterate what Commissioner Wright
17 said, that when we see a need to do something different, there will be
18 notification in advance so people can plan how that affects them and their
19 families.

20 CHAIRMAN SVINICKI: Thank you for that, Dan. I always
21 just use the examples closest to me, but absolutely, and I should have
22 mentioned all of our locations.

23 And I know some have wondered if, you know, are you
24 constantly looking at my area because I haven't heard anything in a while?
25 That's like Commissioner Caputo said. That doesn't mean that it isn't
26 constantly being reevaluated.

1 And I told you Tia and Gina, I would lose track, but I think
2 it's Gina.

3 MS. DAVIS: Okay, this was touched on during this
4 morning's briefing. So, the next question is what are your views on how well
5 positioned the NRC is to maintain a skilled workforce and a cadre of future
6 leaders?

7 CHAIRMAN SVINICKI: Well, I'll start out because then I
8 can say just something really obvious before others claim it, which is that there
9 was mention this morning of the hiring we've done recently while limited. I
10 think it was Laura Dudes said they are so like accomplished and impressive,
11 and I'll say this even though I --

12 Sometimes I read like, or even if it's maybe a senior resident
13 inspector that's been selected or something, I read their credentials and
14 background and I'm like, I don't think I could qualify to work here.

15 That's like sometimes how I feel, which seems like a not --
16 but thank goodness I'm not an inspector, and whenever I've gone to a facility
17 and at the end of the visit, they said to me, the licensee says, "Well, what do
18 you think?" I'm like, ask these good people from the NRC, the inspectors that
19 are with me. I am in no way credentialed to do their job.

20 So, that gives me a lot of optimism about the future, just --
21 and it's not a surprise to me that these wonderful, qualified, accomplished
22 people want to work here, and it is competitive because there are people that
23 are similarly credentialed.

24 So, we're -- that puts us in this luxurious situation of taking
25 the people that we think are going to be the best fit here and it's an
26 embarrassment of riches in that sense.

1 You know, the open question is, you know, will there be
2 sufficient numbers? This morning, we talked a lot about people like it here,
3 so they come and stay, so we've got that going for us, but on the other hand,
4 there is a period in time that people say, much like Miriam Cohen from this
5 morning talked about, you know, she's retiring.

6 People have other things they want to do. They want to
7 spend more time maybe on projects, or grandchildren, or any number of
8 reasons I've heard about attending NRC retirements over the years.

9 So, the question then becomes like are we putting the right
10 considerations in place to both have the numbers of people, to be providing
11 training and rescaling?

12 I hate that term, but I use it because that's what people say,
13 but just basically to say this person has 85 percent of what they need to do a
14 job we need them to do. Let's just train them the other 20 rather than bring
15 in an external hire and have to do a more comprehensive rooting in our
16 regulatory framework.

17 So, I'm optimistic, but my optimism comes with the caveat
18 that it will take very careful monitoring and I think incessant adjusting and
19 modifying exactly, you know, who are the people we're targeting for retention.

20 Who are the people that we're really trying to get them to
21 agree to be retrained or rescaled for something else? And then who and what
22 types of skill sets and levels of experience should we be bringing in, either
23 from other agencies or from outside the government? So, with constant
24 attention, I am optimistic.

25 I think the other thing to confront which I'll toss in here, but
26 this is a little wonky and I don't know kind of the areas the folks originating this

1 question or area of questioning were asking about, but if you work in reactor
2 space, there is such a diversity of types of new technologies and designs that
3 I think that NRC will have to take a fundamental look at whether it is realistic
4 to have an entire ecosystem of homegrown experts that know this type of
5 reactor technology.

6 Well, that's a different way of going about it. As I engage
7 with our international peers and regulators from around the country, some
8 have technical support organizations, and I realize the Office of Research
9 probably just had a heart attack. What I'm saying is that it is a blend of saying
10 that this institute or national lab might have a center of excellence on some
11 attribute of a different fuel or a different, you know, power generating, or even
12 a medical technology.

13 We might, rather than having the time and bandwidth to
14 become completely expert, we may be needing to lean into our folks in
15 contracting and others to make sure we have free of conflict of interest access
16 to, you know, academic institutes or others that could supplement.

17 Because when you're regulating a lot of the same thing, you
18 can really have it all in-house, but I think that NRC, if it's reviewing 12 designs
19 that look different ten years from now or even less, I just don't know that we
20 would have enough time to get there and have it all inside our own system.

21 So, those are just some considerations on the topic. Would
22 anyone else like to -- Commissioner Baran?

23 COMMISSIONER BARAN: Just briefly. I think I really
24 appreciate the question because it's just a critical issue for the agency, making
25 sure we have the workforce we're going to need to keep doing the work we're
26 going to be doing ten, 20, 30 years from now.

1 And I'll be honest, a couple of years ago, I was pretty
2 discouraged because we had gotten down to basically negligible external
3 hires and it had stayed there for kind of a while, and I didn't think that was
4 really a healthy place to be for the organization because you need to have
5 new talent coming into the organization.

6 And it has started to turn around over the last couple of
7 years. Those numbers are coming up, you know, and if we had the graph in
8 front of us, it's pretty steep from the last couple of years. And if we've got
9 attrition of, you know, maybe 180 or so people from this last fiscal year and
10 we hired about 100, it's still, from my point of view, probably not enough. I
11 think we need to keep --

12 I think we're going to have to have a sustained commitment
13 to external hiring in the coming years at higher levels than we achieve now,
14 but it's really, I think, a marked improvement from where it was a year or two
15 ago.

16 So, I'm encouraged by that and I'm looking forward to having
17 more cohorts of NRAN coming in, having that pipeline of new talent and the
18 lateral hiring externally.

19 None of that forecloses, you know, people filling positions
20 from within, but I think there are always going to be new openings created and
21 we're going to need to bring folks in to fill those positions because while it's
22 true, you know, we may have a reactor here closing or a reactor there, or one
23 project ends, we have so work that still is left to be done and new work coming
24 in.

25 And so we need to make sure we have the workforce to do
26 that and it's going to be more than just targeted external hiring. We're going

1 to need real external hiring for, you know, the foreseeable future.

2 I think that would be true even if we didn't have so many
3 people who are retirement eligible, but particularly with that, I think it's going
4 to be important.

5 CHAIRMAN SVINICKI: Commissioner Caputo?

6 COMMISSIONER CAPUTO: I think we're doing okay for
7 now, but I would probably liken it to jumping rope. I think as long as we
8 remain focused, we'll be fine, but if we lose our focus, it's very easy to get
9 tripped up.

10 I think a lot of what we heard this morning is very
11 encouraging about how to -- how we are using, you know, workforce planning,
12 some of the human capital data analytics going on.

13 We're looking at how our workload shifts over time with
14 strategic workforce planning, and using a lot of these tools to help employees
15 learn what their opportunities may be in the future and how to plan a career
16 path that they're excited about that really emphasizes their skills and their
17 interests, and help them develop into the jobs that we will have in the future.

18 And so I think we have a lot of great tools that are underway
19 that are very, very helpful, but I do think the profile of, you know, the
20 embarrassment of riches that we have in terms of very senior, very
21 experienced personnel that will leave big shoes to fill.

22 And so we need to remain focused, I think, on just the profile
23 in our workforce and make sure that we are offering training opportunities,
24 mentoring and coaching to help people develop into the positions that will be
25 coming open as those folks leave the agency and journey into retirement. So,
26 I do think it's an area that we will need to remain vigilant on for quite a while.

1 COMMISSIONER CAPUTO: Thank you. Commissioner
2 Hanson?

3 COMMISSIONER HANSON: Thank you. No, I think
4 that's -- I'll touch on, I think, what some of my colleagues have said, right. All
5 organizations have to make a complex set of decisions around whether or not
6 to make or buy things, right, whether --

7 And sometimes that's, I think, to the Chairman's point, that
8 sometimes that's going to be around a specific technology, whether we buy
9 that from, say, a university, or a national lab, or what have you.

10 In terms of the making of talent, you know, I'm particularly
11 optimistic about the university programs and our relationships with them
12 through workforce development programs and the integrated university
13 program itself, as well as the 36-ish research reactors that are out there as
14 really being kind of test beds.

15 Commissioner Baran and I both had the chance recently to
16 talk to the research and test reactor community, and at least, you know, one
17 of the things that I tried to emphasize in my talk was, you know, these reactors
18 provide opportunities for students to actually learn regulatory skills in addition
19 to technical skills, which are so important.

20 All of these things are licensed. They come in for license
21 amendments. We process those amendments, and so there is -- again, I love
22 the term that you used, Chairman Svinicki, the ecosystem around these
23 things.

24 I think there's rich soil to grow talent in the country's
25 universities for some of the skills that we're going to need down the road.

26 CHAIRMAN SVINICKI: Yes, Commissioner Wright?

1 COMMISSIONER WRIGHT: I can't pass this up. You
2 know, I really appreciate how the agency has started to address this because
3 it had been a stale area. A couple of years ago, I think it was recognized that
4 we -- the recruitment initiatives that we had out there had to be really fired up
5 again, and we recognized that.

6 I think during the summer intern hire, not last year, maybe it
7 was last year or the end of the year before, you know, we got the high school
8 science project stuff that gets people encouraged, and the university program
9 is going to grow.

10 The NRAN program is just awesome. You know, I've had
11 the opportunity to speak to these young men and women for the last couple
12 of years and I'm even proud there's a Clemson guy in there, you know, so,
13 Hayden, but I appreciate that the agency is -- I can't pass the opportunity to
14 hit Clemson every now and then, just prop them up. You got to represent.

15 But I really appreciate the way that the agency has started
16 to focus on this, Margie, and, you know, Miriam's been key in trying to put this
17 stuff together, and hopefully Mary's going to follow through and do even more
18 with that, so thank you.

19 CHAIRMAN SVINICKI: All right, thank you very much. I
20 think we are ready for the next question, Gina.

21 MS. DAVIS: The next question is focused on new reactors.
22 This summer, the NRC affirmed new guidance on non-light water reactor
23 methodologies, including new reactor technologies, advanced, and small
24 modular reactors.

25 Congress has urged the NRC to step up its advanced
26 reactor rulemaking known as Part 53. What are your thoughts on the steps

1 the agency is taking to support these new and advanced technologies?

2 CHAIRMAN SVINICKI: Well, I will just share a thought and
3 quick reaction. First of all, I'm harkening back to the very interesting and valid
4 question about how can I be transforming or modernizing a process while I'm
5 doing it?

6 There is a way, and people may say this is unrealistic, but
7 kind of standing that question on its head and saying if I get a really interesting
8 case in here, it's like a wonderful opportunity to go about developing it in a
9 different way.

10 Now, rulemaking is something that has existed since the
11 origins of the NRC, so we have had a responsibility to do rulemaking and to
12 carry that out under the structure that's laid out for us in law of the
13 Administrative Procedure Act, and so we have a lot of ways that we've done
14 that.

15 We have a tremendous track record, but one way of looking
16 at Congress' strong bipartisan interest in advanced reactors and their
17 eagerness to have NRC set the rules of the road somewhat in a regulation, so
18 that is -- I differentiate that from how we've been doing it.

19 We've been really engaged with people before they apply to
20 us for a review through the pre-application engagement and working with them
21 to find the right kind of lane to be funneled through in terms of the development
22 of their technology and marrying that up with the NRC's process for ultimately
23 making these safety and environmental findings that we make to approve a
24 design.

25 So, I viewed the staff's proposal on this particular
26 rulemaking, which does have a deadline for completion that's laid out in law.

1 That's not typical around here, so usually we have a little bit more discretion,
2 but had a no later than date laid out in law.

3 And the NRC staff had come forward with some innovative
4 ways to maybe give us greater confidence that given the challenge and
5 technical complexity of this particular rulemaking, how could they go about it
6 slightly differently and increase their odds of getting a good product out within
7 the time frame that the law allowed.

8 When I voted on it, my vote was meant as an
9 encouragement to take that creative impulse of releasing concepts, and
10 getting comment, and holding public meetings, and then iterating and
11 evolving.

12 It would have more iteration steps than how we traditionally
13 do rulemaking, but I thought if there was ever a subject matter that was tailor-
14 made for this kind of rapid cycling and then releasing something and getting
15 reactions of people saying that will work or won't work based on the different
16 technologies.

17 In some ways, I kind of just thought the staff should just
18 double down, and if they're going to go innovative, they should just go all-in
19 innovative. So, this, I would say, is an opportunity to --

20 Now, it's a high consequence opportunity because there's a
21 lot of visibility on the subject matter, on the rulemaking, and it has a statutory
22 deadline, but sometimes you look at something and say I don't know, with my
23 traditional approaches, I'm not sure I'm going to get there with a good product
24 by the date stipulated, so in some ways, you have nothing to lose if you go
25 about it slightly differently.

26 So, those were just some ways that I approached the staff's

1 proposal to maybe innovate in more rapid cycles on this particular rulemaking.
2 My vote was intended to really encourage them in that regard. I don't know
3 if anyone else wants to talk about this particular matter. Commissioner
4 Caputo?

5 COMMISSIONER CAPUTO: One of the aspects of this I
6 think is important for us as an agency is just this is an entirely new area for us
7 to actually be regulating in, and technologies that may have been explored in
8 the '50s and '60s, to now see not just a couple of companies, but a whole
9 range of companies exploring a whole range of technologies, and it will be
10 extremely challenging for us to really be able to wrap our hands around it and
11 provide timely regulatory reviews that do meet our safety and security mission
12 and ensure adequate protection of health and safety.

13 And so given our history, I think it's really important for us to
14 finish this rulemaking in a time that supports a lot of these companies in terms
15 of the times that they are looking at for deployment because I think the further
16 out that rule is pushed, the more we force companies to come in under our
17 existing framework.

18 And while that is acceptable and we can do it, with this wide
19 range of technologies, they are all going to need slightly different exemptions.
20 You know, it will be case by case, and I think it gets incredibly complicated
21 very quickly.

22 And so, you know, I think our best approach, our most solid
23 approach is to try and get through this rulemaking to try and get these reviews
24 into what Congress looks at as a technology-inclusive, risk-informed,
25 performance-based rulemaking.

26 I don't think they could have squirted any more adjectives in

1 there, but that, I think, is really the best, most well-rounded approach to try
2 and provide timely reviews for these technologies that will be trying to come
3 into the market.

4 CHAIRMAN SVINICKI: Commissioner Hanson?

5 COMMISSIONER HANSON: Thank you. Yeah, I agree
6 with what the Chairman and Commissioner Caputo said. I think another
7 element of this, in order for it all to be successful too is on licensees, and to
8 interact early and often with the NRC.

9 I think some of the early successes that we've seen in the
10 advanced reactor area have been with folks who have ideas and have come
11 to the Commission with topical reports so that --

12 Because really as we go through this with the diverse array
13 of technologies, it's really going to be about opportunities for the staff to learn
14 and learn how these technologies can be safe, learn how they operate, learn
15 what the risks are, learn all of these things, and when the licensees come in,
16 it's maybe the part that we have the least control over, but I think it's also a
17 really critical element.

18 I think it would be very hard for anybody if a licensee came
19 in and had that completely finished product that nobody had ever seen before,
20 and kind of dropped it on the staff and said, okay, so, you know, let's run this
21 through Part 53, when oftentimes what we really need are a whole, as the
22 Chairman said, a whole iterative approach on both sides, both to our
23 rulemaking, but also an iterative approach to specific technologies and our
24 evaluation of them, so, thank you.

25 CHAIRMAN SVINICKI: Thank you. Anyone else?
26 Commissioner Baran?

1 COMMISSIONER BARAN: Well, I don't know if this is a
2 terribly profound point, but, you know, something that Commissioner Caputo
3 said made me think of it.

4 And I do think, you know, the trick we'll have is we're in a
5 situation where we're simultaneously going to be doing this rule and the staff
6 will be reviewing individual applications that are coming in. You know, so,
7 one has already come in. I don't think it will be the last.

8 And so, you know, I think we'll have to be flexible and the
9 staff is going to really have to be focused on, you know, how we resource this
10 in a way that works, that progress can continue to be made on the overall
11 framework, which I agree, we want to get in place, that ideally, you know, you
12 get it in place as soon as you can, but also, you know, continuing the very
13 specific work of dealing with reviews of individual applications.

14 And, you know, I'm a -- I don't have any concerns about
15 meeting the statutory deadline for that rulemaking, and I think it's good to be
16 looking for opportunities to accelerate that, and the Commission, you know,
17 ended up with an SRM that is targeting, you know, 2024 for the completion of
18 that rulemaking.

19 I do look at it as a pretty challenging rule. I think it's going
20 to be a tough rule and, you know, when you have an approach of let's start
21 with a blank sheet of paper and have a potentially extremely broad scope, not
22 to mention all of the different technologies that in many ways aren't very much
23 alike, and try to do all of that in one rulemaking, it's not going to be easy.

24 I mean, I think it's -- that's not to be pessimistic about it. It's
25 just I think it's going to be a challenging rule to do. You know, we see a lot of
26 rulemakings that do one thing or two things that are focused on a fairly narrow

1 issue. That's not going to be this rule. It's going to be much broader than
2 that, broader scope and more challenging.

3 And so I think we're just going to need to be flexible. You
4 know, in an ideal world, we'd have that framework in place and then
5 applications would come in. Well, we're not in the ideal world. That's not
6 where we are.

7 Applications are already coming in and we're still years
8 away from having the framework completely in place, but we're going to have
9 and the staff's going to have just a, you know, an important, but tough
10 balancing act of doing the general and the specific at the same time.

11 CHAIRMAN SVINICKI: Okay, thank you. Gina, we're
12 ready for the next question.

13 MS. DAVIS: Okay, the next question is on diversity and
14 inclusion. We have received a couple of questions pertaining to the recent
15 executive order about diversity and inclusion training and programming.

16 The EO requires that OPM review diversity and
17 management training before it is conducted by an agency. Does that prohibit
18 all discussion of diversity in the agency?

19 Would the Commissioners be willing to comment on the
20 potential impacts on our staff and on our ability to attract and retain a diverse
21 staff from pausing these activities?

22 CHAIRMAN SVINICKI: Well, thank you, and I -- in this
23 morning's meeting, we had, I thought, some really great exchange on this, and
24 so I mean this in the most sincere way.

25 I will attempt to approach with any sophistication the answer
26 of what kind of evolved organically in this morning's meeting, but in all

1 sincerity, if a staff person had not and did not have a chance to see that, if you
2 could go look at the archive webcast, and I meant when I complimented
3 Commissioner Hanson who just happened to lead off our questioning this
4 morning.

5 He explored with the NRC staff and multiple members of the
6 panel just to get complete clarity on the dialogues that we not only can have,
7 but we should be having and we need to continue to have.

8 So, I commend that to you because I can't possibly --
9 someone asks you, you know, later and says, oh, I heard something
10 informative happened. Retell it to me right now. You always feel pressure
11 like I can't possibly create that from this morning, but --

12 And in terms of the executive order, I think as was also
13 discussed this morning, we are moving as an agency that is complying with
14 the order. We're moving through the steps. I don't know if we've submitted
15 some of the information.

16 Perhaps Margie or someone can just augment my answer,
17 but, you know, we have submitted information to OPM consistent with the
18 executive order, and I'm confident.

19 You know, just on the nature of the activities we conduct
20 here, I'm confident that depending on how voluminous OPM's review is, I'm
21 confident that we would, you know, sooner hopefully than later receive any
22 kind of clearance we need to move forward.

23 And I don't know if Margie, in terms of the sequence of
24 events, you want to talk about that?

25 MS. DOANE: Okay, yeah, let me take that and add a little
26 bit to the question, Chairman. I think you hit it well and I think that this

1 morning's conversation was really important and had a good discussion about
2 what we can and can't do right now.

3 So, we have suspended our training as you indicated to be
4 consistent with the order, but we can continue and have all intention of
5 continuing to have the discussions around, you know, what behaviors promote
6 a diverse and inclusive workforce, and one that's embracing of change and
7 allowing people to bring their whole selves to work.

8 People should still feel comfortable reporting any kind of
9 harassment or any kind of anything that they feel isn't appropriate. All of
10 those mechanisms are still in place for staff to report, and they should, and
11 then they should feel free to have these conversations that they've been
12 having about, you know, how they're personally feeling and what kind of
13 support they need as we go forward because it's a really difficult time right
14 now, so that's number one.

15 Number two, with respect to our submission, we don't have
16 the submission complete yet, but we are in constant contact with OPM
17 because we just have a few questions about a few things that have to go down
18 and some different things, but we are working on that and trying to get it out
19 as quickly as possible.

20 And we are confident that what we send down, all of our
21 training, will come back as approved because we think it is consistent with
22 what is not prohibited by the order.

23 CHAIRMAN SVINICKI: Thanks for that, Margie. Did
24 anyone else want to chime in? The question was broad. Commissioner
25 Hanson?

26 COMMISSIONER HANSON: Well, thank you. I mean,

1 you know, Stephen Smith, you know, said this morning and I thought he was
2 pretty clear about the discussions that people are still allowed to have, right?
3 So, I think the answer to that, can people have these discussions? At least
4 what I heard him say this morning was yes, absolutely, right?

5 And really, I mean, a lot of this comes down to, and it always
6 comes down to the people in the NRC and the individual interactions that they
7 have, right, and helping our fellow employees understand, you know, our own
8 perspectives, and backgrounds, and reaching out, and understanding where
9 they're coming from, you know, their histories and their perspectives as well.

10 And so all of that kind of interacts together, and I'm hopeful
11 that we will get through this OPM wicket that's been set up for us and that the
12 training that people have really appreciated and gotten so much out of at the
13 NRC to date will be able to continue.

14 CHAIRMAN SVINICKI: Thank you. Yes, Commissioner
15 Wright?

16 COMMISSIONER WRIGHT: So, this morning's dialogue
17 was very good and I do also recommend it to you. If you want, go watch it,
18 please.

19 But one thing that was important and is important for people
20 to understand is this wasn't targeted at the NRC. It was all, you know, it was
21 every agency in government, so we're just responding to the request like
22 everybody else is having to do.

23 I agree with Margie that once everything is reviewed, I'm
24 positive that we're going to be cleared because I know the employees here,
25 you know. I've seen them. I've met them. I've talked to them. I've
26 participated with them.

1 So, I feel very confident and I'm very proud of the way that
2 our agency as a whole, person to person, just behaves and respects each
3 other, so that's all I have to say.

4 CHAIRMAN SVINICKI: Thank you. Anyone else?
5 Commissioner Caputo?

6 COMMISSIONER CAPUTO: I would like to just briefly say
7 that, you know, while this executive order may create some confusion and
8 uncertainty in people's minds, I mean, one thing remains absolutely clear and
9 that is that discrimination has no place in our workforce.

10 And, you know, whether it's a matter of feeling comfortable
11 to make a contribution in a meeting, or whether it's the comfort level to raise a
12 concern, it's important for us as an agency that it's a welcoming environment
13 and that those contributions, no matter what they are, are respected.

14 And so I think one of the things that's very encouraging to
15 me was Stephen's talk this morning about just his office and the work they do,
16 and everything that gets done to advance a work environment where we are
17 focused on civility, and diversity, and inclusion.

18 And, you know, I think that's important for us to remain
19 focused on, you know, as we work our way through the details of this review
20 and its outcome.

21 COMMISSIONER BARAN: I completely agree. I couldn't
22 have said it any better.

23 CHAIRMAN SVINICKI: Well, when someone says that, I
24 shouldn't say anything more on the topic, but I did just want to --

25 (Laughter.)

26 COMMISSIONER BARAN: You might be able to say it

1 better. I can't say it better.

2 CHAIRMAN SVINICKI: No, well, I'm not sure, but that
3 always seems like the finishing brush stroke, so maybe I should stop.

4 But as I was listening this morning and just now, you know,
5 I have served. I serve with these fine fellow members of the Commission
6 now, but I have served with a lot of commissioners and, you know, have
7 served under many chairmen here, and, you know, we are also a part of this
8 organization's culture.

9 And many of us, not under COVID, but, you know, where
10 we can have our affinity group gatherings, and the heritage events, and the
11 other things, I don't know if the staff would be aware that often commissioners
12 leave and are talking to each other about individual testimonials or
13 perspectives that we've heard there about what it reminded us of in our own
14 life experience.

15 And so we draw energy and strength from those events just
16 like any other employee here. I mean, our experience when we sit and listen
17 to a guest speaker is no different, so we are enriched by that and it's true.

18 And, you know, I have served with a lot of different
19 individuals, people of different backgrounds, personality types, and I was
20 trying to in my mind think, all right, was there ever anyone who didn't, you
21 know, I didn't have that kind of exchange with after attending one of these
22 group's events and/or coming from the twice yearly EEO-focused discussions
23 that we have as a Commission.

24 So, you know, as we work through this process, the
25 Commission, I think, will be as eager as any other NRC employee to get
26 through the review and recommence, so I just wanted to add that and I think

1 we are ready for another question.

2 MS. DAVIS: Given the declines in the OIG safety culture
3 survey that would indicate a decline in the NRC's safety culture, what steps
4 do you see the Commission taking to help improve the safety culture within
5 the NRC?

6 Has the Commission considered revising its policy
7 statement on safety conscious work environment to include internal safety
8 culture, which was removed between the draft statement and the final
9 statement, and/or expressing support for legislation to improve the protections
10 for the NRC staff who raise concerns?

11 CHAIRMAN SVINICKI: I am seeing note taking because I
12 think there's some more general request for reaction and then there's some
13 specifics that I might not be entirely conversant in some of the details of survey
14 changes over the course of time, which I think I heard in the question.

15 Let me begin at kind of the highest, widest aperture on this
16 question, which is that as a member of this Commission, now as Chairman, I
17 take very seriously when, you know, the results are coming out and I hear it's
18 declines. It's some strengths, but overall, you know, it doesn't look good.

19 I bring the same kind of care and attention to that as I think
20 any other NRC member, or Commissioner, or leader would say I need to really
21 look at this and see what is it? Because it isn't just one marker. It is a whole
22 set of interrelated markers and survey instruments.

23 And so in looking at that, speaking only for myself because
24 each member of the Commission reviews and forms their own views on any
25 of these survey instruments that we do internally, I felt that I could make some
26 cognitive connection between areas that had seen decreases and some of

1 what I know the organization is going through right now.

2 That is not kind of grabbing excuses or saying, oh, I
3 attributed it to a high-level trend, so I don't give it any more thought, because
4 that's not how we take safety culture survey results here.

5 But I do think that you are going to see, depending on what
6 is the organization challenged with right now, some of these many questions
7 are going to indicate and point you towards things that are challenges for us
8 as an organization.

9 And that doesn't make us deficient. It doesn't make us
10 diminished. It just, there's a logical correlation and some things I understand
11 based on the question.

12 The other thing is the longer you're here and the more you
13 read these questions, and you look at the individual questions and their
14 results, you think to yourself, oh, you know, some of this, I know that this part
15 of our organization is looking at this, or we're having cuts in corporate support,
16 or there's overall a lack of promotion opportunity on people.

17 So, and again, it isn't to kind of wish it away or reason it
18 away, but those kinds of survey results, the reason that leaders at every level
19 and members of the Commission look at it with such granularity is because
20 we can, in our knowledge of the organization, say this set of targeted
21 responses to this overall rating are probably going to be the ones that would
22 have the best remedying effect on the declines we're seeing.

23 So, we need to understand it at a forensic level because we
24 will then be engaging the NRC leadership on what are the measures that the
25 organization is going to take in response to what we see here.

26 So, that's just kind of generally the process through which I

1 take onboard the survey results. I monitor them from survey to survey, and
2 then as a member of the Commission, always engaging with the staff on how
3 they're going to react.

4 I don't know if there's any elements of that process, Margie,
5 you would want to -- that I'm kind of missing there or in terms of the staff
6 developing action plans and responses that you'd like to talk about?

7 MS. DOANE: Thanks, Chairman. Yes, I would like to talk
8 about this because we have looked at the data and we have a team that's
9 actually looking at the culture as a whole of the agency.

10 And they have taken this data and also the FEVS data that
11 we received, and they have analyzed all of this information and put in place a
12 plan where they have laid out milestones for all of us, and it is at the
13 organization level because, as you alluded to, the data isn't the same for every
14 aspect of the organization.

15 So, each separate group within our agency, each separate
16 organization, is going to have to look at this data themselves and their data
17 and see what change would really be necessary at their level.

18 But also there are some things that we need to do at the
19 agency level. So, we have the culture team that's continuing to work. They
20 integrated all of this data. They have ambassadors that are in every single
21 office.

22 They've put milestones in place to talk about what the next
23 steps should be and they've identified already a set of behaviors that we think
24 will take us from what our behaviors are now to where our behaviors, a more
25 embracing culture where that would be.

26 They've identified those working with the executives and

1 staff because they've gone out and done focus groups and gathered
2 information through not only their survey, but then focus groups. So, that's to
3 say we are doing a very intensive effort to address what we have seen.

4 One thing I will point out, and you can slice and dice this
5 data however you want, but two things that we did pay attention to right away
6 were that the ability to raise safety issues, staff actually responded more
7 positively.

8 Now, it was just a small uptick, but it was comforting to all of
9 us because we knew that we were going through change, and so we
10 anticipated that people would be unsettled, but we were hoping that in the
11 areas that were most important, are they committed to the mission, do they
12 understand the mission, and then ability to raise safety issues, that we were
13 more confident.

14 CHAIRMAN SVINICKI: Thank you. Did anyone else want
15 to -- Commissioner Baran?

16 COMMISSIONER BARAN: Well, I do think it harkens back
17 a little bit to something we were talking about earlier which is particularly when
18 we were talking about making a change, you know, in terms of oversight, or
19 inspection, or substantive standards, it's just going to be so crucial that we do
20 get the variety of perspectives early in that process, and hear folks out, and
21 make sure we're hearing all of that.

22 And you know, there may not unanimity on every potential
23 change, and I guess there doesn't have to be for a recommendation to be
24 made to the Commission obviously, but I think it's going to be very important
25 for changes that are recommended to the Commission to have a really good
26 sense of where the staff is, not just, you know, kind of where management is,

1 ultimately where they end up on a recommendation, but what are the differing
2 views within the staff on those issues so that we can understand all of that.

3 And it's going to be really important and continues to be
4 really important for individual staff who have a particular view to step up and
5 express their view. You know, if there's a conversation going on and you
6 have a strong view, express it. It doesn't have to be a strong view. It could
7 just be a view. Express it, and make sure, you know, your voice is heard.

8 And then I think for the staff as a whole, we've got to make
9 sure we're just touching bases with all of the groups and subsets of the agency
10 that really matter, particularly if we're talking about inspection change. Make
11 sure we understand what the regions think about it. Make sure we
12 understand what individual inspectors think about it.

13 You know, we've kind of piloted some of the tools like the
14 Jam, right? I mean, you know, we could have a subset on some of these
15 issues with just the inspectors and understand where they are on different
16 issues.

17 And, you know, as we've kind of talked about in other
18 meetings, it's not that one person's right and one person's wrong, or one
19 person's good and one person's bad. There's going to be a variety of views,
20 and we've got to understand what all of those views are and really take them
21 into account.

22 And if we're doing that, if we're really doing that and we're
23 serious about doing that, you know, that's going to contribute to that safety
24 culture that we need here.

25 CHAIRMAN SVINICKI: Thank you. Commissioner
26 Caputo?

1 COMMISSIONER CAPUTO: Well, this is another one of
2 those places where I think communication becomes absolutely essential.

3 And as I mentioned in this morning's meeting, one of the
4 concerns that I've heard voiced from staff is that, you know, they do these
5 surveys and they raise these concerns on the surveys and so on, but they
6 don't seem to see management act on it.

7 And so to the extent that agency leadership is looking at
8 these things and specifically taking efforts to address things that were
9 highlighted in those surveys, I would just encourage agency leaders and
10 managers to communicate that to the staff.

11 Because there needs to be a certain element of yes, we
12 heard you. We understand. We're working to improve these situations or
13 these particular aspects to let folks know that, you know, you didn't waste your
14 time filling out the survey. The input, you know, was not just taken and tallied,
15 but it was heard, and understood, and actively working to address it, and so I
16 think that communication component is also very important.

17 CHAIRMAN SVINICKI: Yes, thank you. Commissioner
18 Wright?

19 COMMISSIONER WRIGHT: Thank you. One thing I
20 don't want our employees to suffer from is survey fatigue because sometimes
21 I think you're surveyed back, to back, to back, to back, to back, right, and
22 sometimes you just, like, check the box. I'm done and I'm tired, and so I
23 would like them to know that we really look at this information and we try to
24 study it.

25 And I know that there's concern out there. You know, the
26 agency has been shrinking. You know, opportunities have been shrinking as

1 a result, so there's concern about, you know, the future, and we're all aware
2 of that and we're all trying to deal with it, and to try to make sure that everybody
3 is, you know, has a job, and has purpose, and feels good about what's
4 happening going forward.

5 So, you know, we're looking at those opportunities and we
6 need them to share with us and not to be afraid, you know, not to have any,
7 not to have that fear, and I think that's what kind of this morning was about
8 too.

9 So, and, you know, I know there's a lot of data out there.
10 Some data, you've been able to study real well, some not as deep as maybe
11 the FEVS survey stuff, but I do think that there's some particular areas where
12 we show really good results and we need to build off of that.

13 So, we don't need to focus all of the time on all of just the
14 negative stuff. We need to look at what's really working well because we can
15 build off of that as well, so I hope we're taking the time to do that.

16 CHAIRMAN SVINICKI: Thank you for that. And, you
17 know, you're tempted to, the longer you're here and you realize that NRC is
18 used to getting an A+ on everything and they want to be the Lake Wobegon
19 of everyone's above average, you know, but, you know, other government
20 agencies are fighting just as fiercely to overtake --

21 Some have benchmarked against us and now they're
22 edging us out in some of their results, so that's what I mean about our culture
23 as a continuous learning organization and it's good that we will continue to try
24 to raise the bar for ourselves, and we're really, in the main, we are not content
25 with anything other than an excellent, very high mark wherever we're looking
26 at ourselves.

1 So, I appreciate that, as Commissioner Wright has
2 mentioned, you know, there are still areas even in a mixed result where we
3 really shine and we need to, you know, hold onto that as an important kind of
4 motivating, as something that we need to keep front of mind.

5 Now, I will very shortly recognize Sheryl Sanchez, but I think
6 that if I confine myself to a short answer and we all do the same, we could
7 have one more question.

8 MS. DAVIS: What is the biggest challenge today for the
9 Nuclear Regulatory Commission regarding the protection of power reactor
10 sites against cyberattacks and how are you addressing it?

11 CHAIRMAN SVINICKI: You know, not just in order to give
12 a short answer, but it is among the most dynamic threats, I think, to any
13 country, and to our country with all of the information technology penetration
14 that we have.

15 We have a very solid track record and we have -- I'm very
16 confident in the cybersecurity regulations we have, but they are really oriented
17 around the types of systems, and reactors, and facilities that we have right
18 now.

19 As the industry looks to be a modern, more IT-connected
20 industry, we will have new regulatory challenges and looking at the penetration
21 of technology in facilities that right now, beyond the IT systems, they've been
22 able to buffer themselves and have more of a thought about kinetic processes
23 than cyber processes.

24 But it will be an area that we will continue to need to work
25 with the entire government interagency to monitor that threat and to continue
26 to evolve and shape our regulations in ways that we can continue to offer

1 equivalent confidence to the American public on the important challenge of
2 cyber. Commissioner Hanson?

3 COMMISSIONER HANSON: I think this is a great question
4 and I think there are at least three kind of interrelated aspects of it. One is
5 just cyber protection of the utility industry writ large and of the grid, right, and
6 those networks. Because of the dynamic demands on the grid, cyber
7 protection is more important than ever.

8 And then you kind of connect that and the possibility of
9 intrusion into substations, and transformers, and other kinds of things, and this
10 is where you make the connection to the existing plants themselves.

11 And I think there, it's kind of two, at least two things for us
12 that we have to grapple with. One is the digital aspect of the technology that's
13 emerging and that we're dealing with now, and then the wireless aspect too.

14 So, and you can see, right? We can island nuclear power
15 plants, isolate them from the grid, and that's a potential approach, but then
16 within that island itself, that we have to have the adequate protections, and
17 we've certainly got a number of things on the books, but we'll have to -- it's
18 going to be a constantly evolving and shifting area for us.

19 CHAIRMAN SVINICKI: Anyone else? Okay, I think with that,
20 before I recognize Sheryl, I want to thank Gina and Tia again. You've stood
21 in for so many voices of NRC employees. Here's a quiet little round of
22 applause for you both. Thank you so much, and you spoke on behalf of a lot
23 of colleagues and did a great job. Thank you.

24 And so as the final element in our all employee meeting this
25 afternoon, I will now recognize Sheryl Sanchez, who is the President of the
26 National Treasury Employees Union chapter here at the NRC, and Sheryl's

1 been kind enough to be available both for a meeting this morning and this
2 afternoon, but she will participate via remote video hookup, and so as long as
3 her Wi-Fi has stayed strong, she is still here. Sheryl, thank you so much for
4 being here. Please go ahead.

5 MS. SANCHEZ: Thank you. Good afternoon, Chairman
6 Svinicki, Commissioners, EDO Doane, NRC managers, non-bargaining unit
7 staff, and the most important group to NTEU Chapter 208, our bargaining unit
8 employees. You are truly the agency's greatest asset and you are the reason
9 the NRC is the best nuclear regulator on the planet.

10 So, how are you doing? My goodness, you all, what a
11 difference a year makes. Last year, as I was reflecting on the year and
12 preparing the union comments for the December 2019 all employees meeting,
13 I was thinking that the worst thing that we would be faced with, during my
14 tenure certainly, was the potential reduction in force, which we narrowly
15 avoided two years prior to that meeting.

16 As a follow up to that very stressful experience, NTEU
17 followed every employee that was impacted, and last November, we fought
18 for the last employee who requested our help by assuring that this employee
19 who had taken one for the team and accepted a position at a lower grade got
20 their position back at the employee's original grade before the two-year time
21 frame ran out when their salary would be permanently reduced to the lower
22 grade.

23 So, although most employees breathed a collective sigh of
24 relief when no employee was separated from the agency that didn't want to
25 leave, NTEU followed through and fought for the employees we represent for
26 years after many employees may have forgotten it even happened.

1 Such will be the case with our experience with COVID-19,
2 although unlike the narrowly avoided RIF, no one living through this will ever
3 forget the experience.

4 Our world will never be the same. Our agency will never
5 be the same, but NTEU will fight for our employees who have been and will
6 continue to be impacted by this pandemic for as long as is necessary.

7 As I address you today, I am very proud to be an NRC
8 employee, and I'm also very proud to be associated with NTEU. In early
9 March of 2020, before the NRC sent our employees home in the mandatory
10 telework phase of our COVID-19 response, Tony Reardon, the President of
11 NTEU National suggested that all federal agencies with more than 50
12 employees send all of their employees home to telework.

13 Although the NRC quickly rallied up and eventually, in my
14 opinion, became the gold standard for how a government agency should
15 handle a pandemic, and I don't say that in a vacuum. I've been
16 communicating with leaders from other NTEU chapters at other federal
17 agencies. Still, some managers and some regions were slower to get the
18 memo than others.

19 It's hard to believe that we considered even for a minute not
20 cancelling the Regulatory Information Conference, and we struggled in the
21 beginning when some employees with preexisting conditions requested going
22 home to telework full time until the situation was resolved and their managers
23 were not initially moved by their concerns.

24 A manager at a region criticized a resident for suggesting a
25 regional employee who was planning to go on site simply to observe a process
26 and was not required to be there might want to be cautious and stay back at

1 the hotel.

2 In all of these cases, the managers corrected their mistakes.

3 We should not be quick to judge anyone who may have underestimated the
4 gravity of the situation early on, and hindsight, as they say, is 20/20.

5 But, and this is an extremely important but, when the
6 COVID-19 task force assured us that after we were sent home to telework,
7 that no employee that was currently working at home full time would be forced
8 back into any NRC building for any reason if they didn't feel safe, they have
9 been true to their promise.

10 We are not just saying that the safety of our employees is
11 our paramount concern. We are walking the walk, and we're not just
12 concerned about our employees' safety.

13 I'm always happy when employees report things like their
14 supervisor has agreed to allow the flexible 24/6 work schedule and full-time
15 telework to continue as long as their elementary school-age children are not
16 back in school. This is encouraging.

17 Obviously, we cannot be aware of every employee that's
18 having concerns, but when employees have identified individual issues to
19 NTEU, we have been able to come to a resolution that was satisfactory to the
20 employee in every case without exceptions.

21 Still, even with an extremely flexible and benevolent agency,
22 I've observed in the past few weeks that many of our employees are
23 experiencing a lot of stress and anxiety to the uncertainty of the current
24 pandemic and general state of the country.

25 This is not the exception for the employees who reach out
26 to me. This is the rule. I honestly didn't see this coming. I thought we were

1 largely an agency of dorks who would do much better than other agencies.

2 I have a t-shirt that says, "I like wine and about three
3 people," and I thought the majority of our employees were in this camp. I was
4 wrong.

5 The fact that we are knee-deep into appraisal season and it
6 appears that last year's half-finished attempt at re-baselining may be finished
7 this year doesn't help, but it seems more than this.

8 This is dragging on too long. Employees are discouraged
9 that their holiday plans will not be what they'd hoped. They don't know when
10 things will get back to anywhere near normal.

11 I read that a psychologist has even coined a term for the
12 stress and anxiety over the extreme polarization and stress over the upcoming
13 election, ESD, or election stress disorder.

14 NRC employees are extremely capable and resourceful, but
15 for some of our employees, the cumulative effect of, well, everything is just
16 too much. Some of the most capable people I know are having meltdowns,
17 crying in their cars or showers, and having extreme anxiety.

18 If you're one of these employees, please reach out to
19 someone. NTEU is here for you. We also have an amazing employee
20 assistance program, or EAP, and all services can be obtained virtually. We
21 are all in this together and we will get through it together.

22 In the meantime, please take care of yourselves and your
23 families, and please be kind, kinder than you think is necessary, kinder than
24 you think the person you are dealing with deserves, especially if they may not
25 be acting so kind. Everyone is dealing with different things and they may be
26 doing their best just to get through the day.

1 We will be stronger as an agency when we come out of this
2 together, and we will. Don't hesitate to reach out to NTEU if you have any
3 questions or concerns, or if you would like our assistance. Thank you so
4 much for your attention, and please vote. Thank you.

5 CHAIRMAN SVINICKI: Thank you very much, Sheryl, and
6 -- I think you need to mute there. Thank you very much. So, thank you for
7 those remarks on behalf of NTEU, and I want to thank all of the NRC staff
8 again, and for all of the wonderful questions that were submitted.

9 Thank you all. And with that, we are adjourned.

10 (Whereupon, the above-entitled matter went off the record
11 at 2:59 p.m.)