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**U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Chairman Christopher T. Hanson
Remarks for the
Organization of Agreement States Annual Meeting
(Remarks as prepared)
August 16, 2021**

Good afternoon. Thank you, Mr. Crowley for the kind introduction.

It is wonderful to be here with you in Philadelphia today. This is actually my first in-person conference since joining the NRC. As you might know, I joined the agency June 2020, during the COVID public health emergency, so most of my interactions have been virtual. As the situation improves, I look forward to more opportunities like this to safely interact with people face to face.

First, I want to thank the staff that made this hybrid meeting possible. I know this was not an easy task, but you made it happen. Also, thank you for taking all the necessary precautions to make us feel safe. Your hard work and dedication did not go unnoticed.

I also want to highlight the important relationship the NRC shares with the Agreement States at the outset of my remarks. Even in the face of a public health emergency, the close coordination and communication between our counterparts did not lapse, and I thank you all for your continued efforts to assure the safe and secure use of nuclear materials nationwide during these trying times.

Introduction

I have already met some of you and I look forward to getting to know more of you. But to start, I can tell you a little bit about myself. I came to the nuclear world largely through the waste and materials side. I started my career as a consultant to state environmental agencies in their collective interactions with the Department of Energy on cleanup of the Cold War environmental legacy.

I later served as a consultant for a number of government and private clients, focusing mainly on strategy, governance, and finance. For government clients, I oversaw the life-cycle cost estimate and the Nuclear Waste Fund for the Yucca Mountain Project and developed financial and governance models for the Global Nuclear Energy Partnership, which you may recall dealt with closed fuel cycles.

In 2009, I joined the Department of Energy's Office of the Chief Financial Officer. I migrated to working for Secretary Steven Chu, handling the Department's relationship with the Appropriations Committees on Capitol Hill.

I later had the privilege and pleasure of working for Assistant Secretary for Nuclear Energy (and former NRC Commissioner) Pete Lyons as a senior advisor on waste and fuel cycle issues.

In 2014, I moved to Capitol Hill, where I handled all things nuclear on the Senate Appropriations Committee—cleanup and waste, nuclear energy and fuel cycle, and national security programs—working closely with Senators Feinstein, Alexander, and others.

Now I want to share my thoughts on some areas where I hope to see continued success for the National Materials Program.

Risk

First is managing risk. Throughout my years of experience in the nuclear sector, I've learned the importance of risk management. Maybe you have heard me speak before in other forums about the importance of being a risk-informed regulator when referring to nuclear power plants. But I think we need to consider risk in everything we do, including the National Materials Program. We need to identify the most risk significant issues so we can focus on what really matters.

The NRC's BeRiskSMART framework was developed to empower our staff to consistently apply and communicate risk insights for all our decisions. I've been pleased to see that recent survey results revealed most NRC staff think the work done under the BeRiskSMART framework is important to accomplish our work. Through this effort, we are constantly asking ourselves, "is the juice worth the squeeze?" Or from the NRC's perspective, will the effort or proposed change lead to an appreciable impact on safety or security?

As you will hear this week, the staff has been using this framework to apply innovative approaches to risk-informed decision making and focusing on the most risk-significant aspects in the oversight program. For example, the staff continues to risk inform the Integrated Materials Performance Evaluation Program process. Specifically, the NRC plans to complete BeRiskSMART Initiatives on State Agreements procedure SA-100, Implementation of the IMPEP, to risk-inform the IMPEP process, enhance communication between members of the National Materials Program, and improve the use of technology.

Of course, these efforts are not possible without the continued engagement and participation of Agreement States members through working groups. I am also glad to hear of the early involvement of National Materials Program partners on proposed rules and guidance that may affect the materials program, including the petition for rulemaking to further risk inform the Naturally Occurring and Accelerator-Produced Radioactive Materials rule. Your engagement helps shape outcomes, particularly when we can obtain your insights and perspectives early in the process.

I am also glad to hear that the National Materials Program Co-Champion initiative has been instrumental in the communications between the NRC program office and the Agreement States and has provided opportunities to strengthen this partnership.

Emergent/New Technologies

Another area of interest to me is regulatory and technical readiness. This entails transformation in the way we conduct our regulatory activities. For example, we need to be ready to regulate fusion energy systems and emerging medical technologies.

As we move forward, it is important that the NRC and Agreement States maintain an open dialogue with all interested stakeholders, especially the public. So far, I have been impressed by communication and coordination by the NRC staff and the Agreement States. I am confident that working together, we will be able to provide a solid foundation of safety and security through the National Materials Program for new and emergent technologies.

I know our staff has been working closely with OAS and the Agreement States in the development of the Fusion Energy regulatory framework. We certainly appreciate feedback received by the working group at the two government-to-government meetings held this past Spring. This is an area of particular interest for me and I look forward to hearing more as progress continues on this topic.

I think this is an opportunity to continue to focus on developing good policy and good government. In my view, good policy means reasonable assurance of adequate protection (obviously), transparency in process and outcomes, and durable decisions that stand up over time. Good government means building up our greatest asset and relationships with our program partners and ensuring adequate resources to protect people and the environment.

I am confident the National Materials Program will continue to build on this foundation. This is reflected by the years of partnership, improvements of the programs through the IMPEP, operational experience, knowledge sharing, and lastly, the intent of more States to join the National Materials Program.

I recognize that within the different Agreement State programs there are resource challenges. We appreciate all the support that has been provided in participation with the Working Groups. But still, I would encourage you to help when you can. With your feedback and assistance, I am confident that the NRC can develop forward looking guidance in this area to ensure efficiency and consistency in the future licensing of emergent and new technologies.

People: Training and Hiring

Now let me focus on another important area, our people. I think it is important to continue to provide steady support for training for Agreement State license reviewers and inspectors to promote a nationally consistent program to ensure the protection of public health, safety, security, and the environment. The staff is undertaking transformative initiatives to make training more efficient and effective, including NRC-Sponsored Training available to Agreement State staff through development of partially online courses. We will continue to engage on any changes to the budget that impact the training program. We will also partner with Agreement States to develop any needed strategies to decrease the impact. Let's keep the focus on our people and prioritize opportunities that train and reinforce the technical knowledge of our staff.

In the area of hiring new talent and expertise, I understand the challenges being encountered by many Agreement States programs. I want to highlight the August 2nd announcement of the availability of the NRC Grants Program. The Program awards scholarships and fellowships to students as well as funding to academic institutions. I would encourage you to take advantage of this opportunity and share it with your respective educational institutions. The NRC grant program supports the areas of health physics and other related radiation-protection specialties, and students who receive these scholarships can meet their service commitment through State employment.

Further, I want to mention that the NRC is working diligently to make tools and processes more efficient and cost effective. For example, modernization efforts are underway to enhance the Web-Based Licensing system. Staff is working on developing electronic submission of license applications through WBL and additional changes that would provide the ability to create and track work plans for activities not related to certifications, licensing, and inspection. It is my hope that through these efforts, we can realize efficiencies that can then be shared with our Agreement State partners.

Appreciation of Agreement State Program and the OAS

In closing, I'd like to take the time to express my appreciation to all the NRC and Agreement States inspectors and license reviewers for your efforts in the face of a pandemic to maintain licensing and oversight of materials licensees. You are the ones in the field making sure the public is safe, and that is no small thing. I hope you feel proud of your accomplishments during this extremely difficult year because you should. I for one am impressed.

Also, I want to thank the Agreement States program directors and the Organization of Agreement States for their leadership and continued dedication to the National Materials Program.

Finally, I want to take this opportunity to extend my congratulations to the State of Maryland on their 50th Anniversary of becoming an Agreement State. The State of Maryland became the 22nd Agreement State on January 1, 1971. I commend Maryland's successful efforts throughout the years in regulating the State's safe use of radioactive materials, thereby protecting public health and safety. Specifically, I want to congratulate the dedicated professionals of the Maryland Department of the Environment for their successful implementation of the Maryland Agreement State Program.

I understand that the presentation of certificate and photo opportunity will be postponed to next year's meeting as Maryland representatives could not be here in person.

With that, thanks again for your time. I'm happy to take any questions you might have.