

Opening Statement
The Honorable Bob Inglis (R-SC), Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Energy & Environment
Committee Print: Nuclear Energy Research and Development Act of 2010
U.S. House of Representatives
July 28, 2010

Chairman Baird, thank you for holding this markup. I'm looking forward to working with you and the Committee to revamp our nuclear energy research and development program and push the nuclear industry into the future. I'm happy to cosponsor the bill before us today.

Our country is eagerly pursuing new energy solutions that will wean us off foreign oil, create American jobs, and clean up our air. Nuclear power fits the bill in every way. Right now, the U.S. gets a fifth of our electricity from nuclear power; South Carolina, I'm happy to say, gets more than half. The nuclear fleet supplying this abundant power is efficient, reliable, and clean. It's also getting old.

To meet our growing energy needs, we're going to need to keep building our nuclear power strength. With this opportunity to reinvest in nuclear research, we have an opportunity to tackle two important issues: the nuclear fuel cycle and capital costs.

For as long as we've been powering our light bulbs off the atom, we've been generating nuclear waste. Our current disposal policy is insufficient; nuclear plants have been stockpiling this waste waiting for the Federal government to open Yucca Mountain. It would be all the better if we could substantially reduce this volume of waste that comes from nuclear power.

Capital costs of a new nuclear facility are unfortunately prohibitive in the current market. While this undoubtedly is due to competition with artificially cheap coal facilities, there are also strategies and techniques we can employ to bring those costs down. This bill will help us do that.

Thankfully, the nuclear industry and DOE are eager to solve these problems. For example, GE/Hitachi has been working on the "PRISM" reactor, a small modular reactor fueled from commercial-grade and defense-grade nuclear waste. The reactor vessel can be built quickly and scaled up at new sites or at existing nuclear facilities. Drawing our power from a PRISM reactor will reduce proliferation concerns and simplify the design requirements for a waste repository.

The bill before us will help us reach more novel solutions like this one.

I want to mention briefly two issues beyond the scope of this legislation and the jurisdiction of the Committee that remain important to the future of the nuclear industry.

First, we need to get nuclear facilities approved and on-line faster. I hope that a robust research program at DOE will maintain steady communication with the NRC, allowing them to be familiar with new technologies before applications come in.

Second, Yucca Mountain needs to be completed as quickly as possible. Unfortunately, responsible long-term storage of our nuclear waste has become strongly politicized, and the Administration continues to snub the explicit will of Congress, the nuclear industry, and electricity rate payers. The sooner we resolve uncertainty around nuclear waste storage, the sooner we'll get more investment in the nuclear industry.

Again, thank you Mr. Chairman. I yield back the balance of my time.