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*****FOR THE RECORD*****

**NRC CHAIRMAN GREGORY B. JACZKO'S STATEMENT ON
NRC'S COMMITMENT TO SAFETY**

The tragic events in Japan have understandably shined a brighter spotlight on the safety of nuclear power in the United States and on the role and actions of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission. As public servants, we pride ourselves on our transparency and openness and welcome the constructive dialogue about ensuring the facilities we license are operated safely and securely.

For more than six years I have served as a Commissioner and now Chairman of this independent federal government agency and I have personally seen the tremendous job the NRC staff does. Our employees are dedicated public servants who come to work every day to do one thing - ensure that nuclear power plants and nuclear materials are safe and secure. Most of our 4,000 employees make this a lifetime endeavor.

In the last several weeks, however, a skewed picture of the NRC has been painted in some stories -- one of missed opportunities and delayed enforcement suggesting an ineffectual regulator. Nothing could be further from the reality. Here are examples that demonstrate why I strongly disagree with these recent accounts.

First, about 18 months ago the NRC staff acted to resolve a significant design concern they identified with the Westinghouse AP1000 reactor design, proposed for construction in Georgia. This is a multi-billion dollar project, but the NRC's effort and focus has been on determining if the design meets our stringent safety requirements and at one point our staff experts determined that it did not. Consistent with our focus on safety the NRC experts told the plant designer that changes were needed or the staff would not approve the design. It was as simple as that. Because of forceful NRC action, the vendor made significant improvements. This took place in full view of the public, including a dissenting opinion by one of our staff members. Despite this transparency, there was little public recognition that this highlighted the NRC's commitment to safety.

Second, also little noticed was our work on the reactor vessel head, the lid of the metal structure that holds the nuclear fuel, of a plant in Ohio known as Davis Besse. Last year, the licensee identified problems with the interim replacement head. The NRC immediately studied the safety significance of this defective component and made certain the plant owner did the

right thing. Far from being a passive regulator, the agency demanded the plant owner accelerate replacement of the component years before the owner wanted to do so. Although this decision requires considerable cost on the part of plant owner, that had no bearing for the NRC safety experts. They simply put safety above all else, just as they had done in the case of the AP1000 reactor design. This is another example of the agency doing the right thing - something routine for the NRC staff. But unfortunately this attracted limited media attention.

Third, during our Japan nuclear incident response, I approved a bold safety recommendation by our most senior, expert staffers. As we were monitoring the fluid situation in Japan, NRC staff became concerned that the situation could worsen and impact Americans living there. Using all of their training, the best available data, and centuries of combined nuclear safety experience, the staff recommended to me that we needed to advise American citizens to stay fifty miles away from the troubled nuclear site, recommendations that differed from the advice of the Japanese government. The staff did not focus on what might be popular with the nuclear industry but instead recommended action in the best interest of safety.

These three examples are just a few of the many ways the NRC staff works day-in and day-out to make sure nuclear power plants and nuclear materials will not cause harm to the public. I could fill the entire newspaper with just a fraction of the proactive safety measures taken by the staff in the last year. Yet as with most of our safety actions, these examples received little public attention.

Of course, we are not perfect. There are things we can do better. Among them is the need to better enforce our regulations designed to protect against the risk of fires at nuclear power plants, something the Commission continues to publicly debate. We are always striving to learn lessons and we will look to the tragedy in Japan to improve our programs, even though this event involved no U.S. nuclear facilities. In fact, just 12 days into the Japan incident the Commission created a task force to look at improvements to our regulations and oversight programs. That task force has already participated in one public meeting and is working systematically and methodically to make recommendations by July.

Ensuring nuclear safety is always challenging. We cannot guarantee the prevention of every possible accident and we seem to only make news when there are issues. But that is precisely our job – to find problems and ensure they are resolved. The knowledge that the dedicated women and men of the NRC are there to advise me and my colleagues on the Commission leaves me confident in our ability to continue to successfully protect the health and safety of the American people.