



NRC NEWS

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

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OPENING REMARKS OF NRC CHAIRMAN GREGORY B. JACZKO AT THE COMMISSION MANDATORY HEARING ON VOGTLE COL

Good morning. I call this hearing to order. We are here today to conduct a mandatory hearing, as required by Section 189(a) of the Atomic Energy Act, on Southern Nuclear Operating Company's application to build and operate two new reactors at the Vogtle site near Waynesboro, Georgia. This hearing will address the Southern Company's application for two combined licenses and its related request for a limited work authorization to conduct pre-construction activities at the Vogtle site.

The review of a new reactor license application is a substantial undertaking. It involves a host of complex technical and legal questions and a broad range of important safety, security, and environmental issues. For the past three years, the NRC staff has been analyzing these issues so that the Commission can make an informed and considered decision on this application. Today's mandatory hearing is one of the final steps in our licensing process before the Commission renders a decision on the application. Everyone here at the NRC has approached this effort fully aware that this is among the most important safety decisions entrusted to the agency.

The Commission's role in this hearing is to serve as an effective check on the staff's work. Before we can reach a decision on the application, we must carefully and thoroughly evaluate whether the staff's safety and environmental reviews have been adequate to support the necessary regulatory findings. Those findings are at the heart of our regulatory mission. Our findings fall into two categories – safety and environmental. They include whether the staff's environmental analysis meets the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act; whether the applicant has the necessary technical and financial resources; and ultimately whether the facility will be constructed and operated safely and securely. Similar findings also must be made with regard to the applicant's request for a limited work authorization. We have fully set forth the findings in the notice for today's hearing.

This is an important and historic day at the NRC. This is the first mandatory hearing on a new reactor license application since the 1970s. This is the first application to reach this final step under the Part 52 licensing process, which was established in the late 1980s. And this is the first time that the Commission itself—rather than the licensing boards—will conduct a mandatory hearing.

I would like to acknowledge the strong leadership of our predecessors on the Commission and, of course, the diligence of the NRC staff in developing and implementing this new licensing process. The decision to assume the responsibility for conducting these mandatory hearings was not taken lightly. The Commission did so after a Task Force, led by former Commissioner Jeff Merrifield, recommended doing so. I fully supported the decision at that time, and continue to believe that it was right, because the Commission ultimately bears the responsibility of making this licensing decision.

I want to thank my colleagues for their efforts in preparing for this important hearing, and to acknowledge the many NRC staff who have worked on this application. The Commission is committed to moving forward with this hearing and reaching a decision on this application in a thoughtful, timely manner that befits the important safety issues under review.

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