

Statement of Commissioner William C. Ostendorff
U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Before the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform

December 14, 2011

Thank you Chairman, Ranking Member Cummings, and Members of the Committee for this opportunity to appear before you today.

I have served on this independent regulatory Commission since April of 2010. In that time, I have come to better appreciate the reputation the NRC has historically enjoyed as a competent regulator and a leader in nuclear safety not only in the United States, but also in the international nuclear community. That reputation can be attributed to the employees of the NRC, who have shown dedication to the safety mission and the NRC's organizational values of integrity, service, openness, commitment, cooperation, excellence, and respect. For decades, these values have served as a guide for the operations of the NRC staff, as well as the Commission. These values have also historically fostered an open and collaborative workplace that brings out the best regulatory and technical judgments of the NRC staff without undue influence or pressure.

Unfortunately, we find ourselves today in an environment where those historical values have been compromised and the agency's reputation placed at risk. Left uncorrected, this trend damages the ability of the NRC staff and the Commission to carry out its nuclear safety mission.

I have over thirty years of service to this country. As a Rickover era career naval officer, I served on six nuclear submarines and commanded a nuclear powered attack submarine for three years. I had subsequent command of a squadron of 8 nuclear attack submarines. I have been personally accountable to the United States for ensuring nuclear reactor safety on our nuclear powered warships for years. Hence, I take great pride in that service and in my own decision-making with respect to the principles that best ensure reactor safety. After retiring from the Navy in 2002, I served in government as a counsel with the House Armed Services Committee professional staff, as a senior official with nuclear oversight responsibilities for the Department of Energy and now with the NRC.

With significant experience in a number of leadership positions dealing with nuclear power and nuclear weapons, I can honestly say that I have never seen an environment where the highest level of the organization does not reflect the values shared by the whole. Along with three of my Commissioner colleagues who took the same oath to "well and faithfully discharge the duties" of our office, I refused to be silent while damage was being done to the NRC's work environment.

It is important to comment on what I will label as an "unprecedented action"-the four of us writing the letter to the White House two months ago-the letter that this Committee received last Thursday evening.

This letter is not about politics (it was signed by two Democratic and two Republican members of the Commission). I regret that our letter is being portrayed by some members of Congress as politically motivated. It is not. It is not about Yucca Mountain. It is not about internal conflict between Commissioners.

Rather, this letter is about management actions that have significantly eroded the prized open and collaborative work environment of our nation's nuclear safety agency. These actions have served to prevent the Commission from being fully informed of the NRC staff's views and recommendations. It is about behavior that if exhibited by one of the NRC's regulated licensees, would be subject to investigation and potential enforcement action for a chilled work environment.

It is about bullying and intimidating behavior towards NRC career staff that should not and cannot be tolerated. And finally, it is about a leadership and management style that attempts to undermine the Commission and has damaged the agency.

In light of our unanimous agreement that these actions cannot continue, the four of us fulfilled our oath of office to take what we viewed as appropriate action. Hence, our letter clearly and unequivocally states our grave concerns to the White House.

I appreciate the Committee's oversight role and the serious nature of this hearing. I look forward to your questions.



UNITED STATES NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

Office of Public Affairs
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COMMISSIONER WILLIAM C. OSTENDORFF



The Honorable William C. Ostendorff was sworn in for a second term as a Commissioner of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) on July 7, 2011, to a term ending on June 30, 2016. His first term was from April 1, 2010, to June 30, 2011.

Mr. Ostendorff has a distinguished career as an engineer, legal counsel, policy advisor, and naval officer. Before joining the NRC, Mr. Ostendorff served as the Director of the Committee on Science, Engineering and Public Policy and as Director of the Board on Global Science and Technology at the National Academies.

Mr. Ostendorff came to the National Academies after serving as Principal Deputy Administrator at the National Nuclear Security Administration from April 2007 until April 2009. From 2003 to 2007, he was a member of the staff of the House Armed Services Committee. There, he served as counsel and staff director for the Strategic Forces Subcommittee with oversight responsibilities for the Department of Energy's Atomic Energy Defense Activities as well as the Department of Defense's space, missile defense and intelligence programs.

Mr. Ostendorff was an officer in the United States Navy from 1976 until he retired in 2002 in the grade of captain. During his naval career, he commanded an attack submarine, an attack submarine squadron and served as Director of the Division of Mathematics and Science at the United States Naval Academy.

Mr. Ostendorff earned a bachelor's degree in systems engineering from the United States Naval Academy and law degrees from the University of Texas and Georgetown University. He is a member of the State Bar of Texas.

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