



*Programming Note: The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission's Annual Regulatory Information Conference (RIC) will take place March 10-12, 2026. For additional information or to register, click [here](#).*

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## **NENSC FLASH**

# **Expert Insight: NRC Independence, Modernization, and the Moment Ahead**

*By William C. Ostendorff and Admiral Richard W. Mies, USN (Ret.)*

*William C. Ostendorff, is a former Commissioner of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. He serves as a member of the NENSC Expert Council.*

*Admiral Richard W. Mies, USN (Ret.) served as the fourth Commander in Chief of United States Strategic Command from 1998 to 2001. He serves as a Co-Chair of NENSC.*

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The Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) is navigating a period of significant change. Multiple major initiatives are advancing at once, and the pace of activity can create the impression of instability.

There is no question that a great deal is happening. But this is a moment of modernization – not alarm.

Much of the activity reflects long-needed efforts to improve efficiency while upholding the NRC's core mission of protecting public health and safety. The Commission recently clarified that mission to reflect today's reality: protecting public health and safety while enabling the safe and secure deployment of civilian nuclear technologies. That update reflects broad recognition – across Congress, the Administration, and stakeholders – that strong regulatory oversight and timely deployment must move forward together.

### **Independence Is Essential – and Worth Defending**

As the Commission evolves, one principle remains constant: independence.

The NRC continues to set the global regulatory standard for the safe operation of commercial nuclear reactors. Its credibility is a cornerstone of public confidence in the U.S. fleet and a critical foundation for U.S. nuclear exports.

Independence is not negotiable. The NRC must remain a safety regulator guided by technical expertise and transparent, evidence-based decision-making. That independence is central to its legitimacy at home and abroad.

The updated mission does not dilute independence; it reinforces the expectation that the United States can demonstrate both regulatory rigor and deployment capability. Independence and reform are not at odds – both are necessary for the NRC to carry out its responsibilities effectively.

A strong, independent NRC benefits everyone: the public, the industry, and U.S. leadership abroad.

### **Nuclear Demand Is Rising Faster Than the System Can Respond**

The Administration has set an aggressive goal of quadrupling U.S. nuclear generation by 2050. Achieving that goal will require greater efficiency in licensing and oversight while preserving the safety standard that underpins public confidence.

The NRC will face growing demands across power uprates, subsequent license renewals, plant restarts, and new technology deployments. The NRC is being asked to do more than ever before – and the nation’s energy future depends on its ability to deliver timely, high-quality regulatory decisions.

Modernization is not optional. It is necessary.

### **Multiple Drivers Are Moving at Once**

Part of the current intensity reflects the fact that several major policy drivers are advancing simultaneously.

In 2024, Congress passed the ADVANCE Act with overwhelming bipartisan support – 393–13 in the House and 88–2 in the Senate. The law directs reforms intended to improve regulatory efficiency while preserving the Commission’s safety mission.

On May 23, 2025, President Trump issued Executive Order 14300, directing rapid review processes and a wholesale revision of NRC regulations and guidance on an accelerated timetable.

Taken together, these actions reflect recognition that a framework developed for a different era must evolve to meet today’s energy and security demands.

### **Progress Is Already Underway**

The NRC has already demonstrated that safety and efficiency can advance together. The agency recently approved subsequent license renewals for the first time since 2021, including Xcel Energy’s Monticello plant, where the review time was reduced by one-third. It also completed the safety evaluation for TerraPower’s construction permit application for the Kemmerer site a month ahead of an already accelerated schedule. These examples demonstrate that the agency can streamline processes while maintaining its rigorous safety standards.

Such accomplishments reflect the dedication and professionalism of NRC staff and leadership, who continue to carry out one of the most important public safety missions in government. The goal is not to weaken regulation, but to ensure the NRC can deliver decisions with greater efficiency and predictability while preserving its independence.

The NRC was already making significant strides, and there should be confidence in its ability to continue.

### **What Industry Has Long Advocated**

For many years, industry has emphasized the need for modern, risk-informed, and performance-based regulation. As demand rises, greater efficiency is essential.

Approval timelines that stretch multiple years are not sustainable if the United States intends to meet its economic and national security objectives. At the same time, the safety foundation must remain intact.

The shared objective is a regulatory system that is rigorous, predictable, and focused on issues of safety significance. That means aligning resources with real risk, avoiding unnecessary process burdens, and providing clear expectations over the full 80-plus-year life of a nuclear facility.

Modernization is not about less oversight. It is about more effective oversight.

### **What “Good” Looks Like**

As reform proceeds, certain guardrails must remain firmly in place.

Reasonable assurance of adequate protection remains the safety standard. That principle does not change.

The NRC must be adequately staffed with experienced, highly skilled experts capable of handling increasing technical complexity. The regulatory framework must be stable and predictable, providing investors and operators confidence that the rules will remain clear and durable over decades. Regulatory attention should focus on issues of safety significance, with risk-informed approaches that improve efficiency while preserving rigor where it matters most.

These objectives are fully consistent with the long-standing guiding principles of good regulation: independence, openness, efficiency, clarity, and reliability.

### **A Moment to Strengthen U.S. Leadership**

The United States can lead the world in nuclear safety and nuclear deployment at the same time. In fact, our credibility abroad depends on demonstrating both.

The NRC’s independence must be protected – but its effectiveness must also be strengthened to meet rising demand and evolving national priorities.

This moment presents an opportunity to modernize the regulatory framework in a thoughtful and deliberate way that reinforces public confidence and supports America’s economic and strategic interests.

In a time of intense scrutiny, the NRC deserves steady support for carrying out one of the most consequential public safety missions in government. Done correctly, reform will reinforce the agency’s strength and ensure the United States remains the global leader in both nuclear safety and nuclear energy deployment.

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*The Nuclear Energy and National Security Coalition (NENSC) is an independent organization of leading national security experts dedicated to leveraging U.S. nuclear energy to advance U.S. national security interests. NENSC is dedicated to expanding recognition of this interdependence among policymakers at all levels and promoting policies that ensure a robust U.S. nuclear energy enterprise.*

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