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Sen. Murkowski: Nuclear Energy Crucial to Future of U.S. Energy Policy *Addresses the Nuclear Energy Institute's 2015 Nuclear Energy Assembly*

Washington, D.C. – U.S. Sen. Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, today stressed the importance of nuclear energy as part of the future of U.S. energy policy at the Nuclear Energy Institute's 2015 Nuclear Energy Assembly in Washington, D.C.



Credit: Nuclear Energy Institute

During her remarks to hundreds of representatives from the nuclear energy sector and the North American Young Generation in Nuclear, Murkowski, chairman of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, recognized the importance of nuclear energy as a major contributor of baseload power to the grid, addressed the issue of nuclear waste storage, and called on the federal government to reduce the regulatory red tape that's holding back the advancement of American nuclear power.

“Nuclear Works. With 99 reactors providing nearly 20 percent of our nation’s power – nuclear is a critical part of the energy mix and it’s important that we build on the decades of safe generation production that nuclear energy has provided America,” Murkowski said. “Our nation must

continue to be the major player on the world stage for nuclear energy and it's essential to encourage innovative nuclear technologies, such as advanced reactors and small modular reactors, to be deployed here at home is key.”

Murkowski has long supported advancing the use of nuclear power as a clean, abundant, and reliable energy source, and modernizing our nation's electricity grid to improve reliability.

The full text of Murkowski's prepared remarks to the Nuclear Energy Institute's 2015 Nuclear Energy Assembly is below and on the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee [website](#).

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**Nuclear Energy Institute
2015 Nuclear Energy Assembly (As Prepared)
Chairman Lisa Murkowski
Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee
May 13, 2015**

My goal today is to provide a policymaker's perspective on the future of U.S. energy policy and what I see as nuclear energy's crucial role within it.

I am a natural optimist – I believe energy is good, and that we should make our energy increasingly abundant, affordable, clean, diverse, and secure. And I believe the future of your industry is bright, not least because it checks all of those boxes.

Yet, as we start out today, we should also acknowledge that certain challenges continue to hold nuclear power back in our country. I know that many in this room have faced lengthy licensing processes with the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. And I think we can all agree that it is time to review that process, to make it more efficient and effective while still maintaining safety.

Since Fukushima, safety is the leading topic when it comes to nuclear energy. Over the weekend at Indian Point, a transformer fire caused the plant to shut down. In this case, the plant worked exactly as designed – it recognized a failure with the transformer and shut down automatically and safely.

With the added benefit of a sprinkler system and onsite firefighters, the fire caused no injuries, no additional damage to plant equipment, and no release of radiation. Safe operation of reactors is the cornerstone of the nuclear industry and remains a vital and core part of the conversation.

Looking to issues beyond, we have seen the regulatory process become a means to promote the Administration's energy agenda. Many of you have heard me say over the years that this Administration regularly charges forward to adopt sweeping policies, without sufficient guidance from or even consultation with Congress. You've heard of putting the cart before the horse; this is the federal equivalent, where regulators put themselves ahead of the law.

I believe the Senate must reassert itself – and, under the leadership of Leader Mitch McConnell, we are. We are making an effort to return to what we call “regular order” to address major issues that require action legislative action. Two good examples related to your industry are the back end of the nuclear fuel cycle and the challenges presented by rules that directly affect nuclear baseload power plants.

EPA's so-called clean power plan – for greenhouse gas emissions at existing power plants – is an instance of a proposed rule that puts nuclear at a disadvantage. It seriously underestimates the contribution of nuclear power to our nation's energy infrastructure. The lack of a focus on clean baseload nuclear power, especially in a rule that – ironically – seeks to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases, continues to undercut the seriousness of this Administration's efforts.

I am hopeful that new legislation from a more functional Congress will provide an avenue for progress on some of these issues. We have not passed a broad energy bill since 2007. To put that in perspective, President Obama was still a colleague of mine in the Senate the last time we passed broad energy legislation, and the iPhone was a brand new invention.

Our energy economy has also undergone a dramatic shift over the past eight years. Our nation has entered an age of abundance. We now talk about exporting oil and natural gas. We are on the verge of being a supplier to the world market, rather than a competitor for the resources offered by others.

On the electricity side of the ledger, government regulations and subsidies have led to more distributed generation being added to a grid that was not designed to deal with the fluctuations of variable power. Subsidies and regulations that pick “winners and losers” have accelerated the rate that variable power has been added to the grid, but has also skewed the valuation of traditional baseload power – such as nuclear.

We have seen early retirements of nuclear plants too often in recent years because of market rules that fail to value the contribution of baseload power to the entire network. It is important that nuclear is recognized as a reliable, carbon-free, always-on power supply – and valued accordingly. Nuclear power provides consistent, reliable energy that keeps the lights and the heat on even in the most challenging of weather conditions.

Plenty of time has passed. Plenty has changed. Real problems still abound. We have ample reason to work on broad energy legislation – so that is exactly what those of us on the Senate Energy Committee are beginning to do. And I believe it offers one of several opportunities for the nuclear industry in the 114th Congress.

We are breaking with tradition as we prepare this bill. Instead of dividing it into titles focused on individual types of energy, we are focused on four broad titles: efficiency, supply, infrastructure, and reforms to promote government accountability. And we are already full speed ahead: tomorrow, we will hold the second of four legislative hearings on the titles of this bill. We are working quickly, so we can report the bill and find time consider it on the Senate floor.

Let me turn now to another area where legislation is likely to be considered in this Congress: the disposition of spent nuclear fuel.

Yucca Mountain remains the statutory repository for spent nuclear fuel and defense wastes, and it has now been more than five years since the Obama Administration declared Yucca Mountain “unworkable” and made efforts to stop all licensing activities associated with the project.

Since then, numerous court decisions have upheld the law and required the Administration to continue to work on the project, but it has moved slowly and the political atmosphere around the Yucca Mountain project is still charged.

The court decision to suspend collection of the nuclear waste fee was the right one, in my opinion. Electric customers should not continue to pay into a fund when the federal government is not providing them with the promised service.

And although the suspension of the fee is fair under the circumstances, by no means does it provide a basis for giving nuclear energy the opportunity to grow.

That is why I have joined with three of my colleagues to reintroduce the Nuclear Waste Administration Act. This legislation mirrors many of the recommendations of the Blue Ribbon Commission and would establish an independent agency to move forward with a consent-based siting process for consolidated storage, while moving forward with a permanent repository on a parallel track.

I look forward to chairing a hearing on this important legislation next month, where I hope that we have a vibrant conversation about the back end of the fuel cycle and the future of nuclear power in this country.

There is also great opportunity for new forms of nuclear energy on the horizon. I have long supported and advocated for the development and deployment of small modular reactors. The potential for this technology in my home state of Alaska is very exciting – the size, power potential, and ability to add unit by unit could be a game changer for small, remote communities that currently pay extremely high energy costs or to supply power to our military bases.

As the United States works toward development and deployment of SMRs, we must ensure that the federal government opens avenues for the development of innovative technologies and does not place unnecessary burdens on this industry.

Maintaining American leadership in nuclear energy is vitally important. Ours is the nation that made nuclear a viable power generation option. We set the safety and nonproliferation standards for nuclear and our universities educate many of the world's nuclear scientists. It is essential that the United States remain the "go-to" country for nuclear know-how. In recent years, many foreign nations have increased investment in their nuclear programs and are challenging (and some would say surpassing) U.S. dominance in this industry.

We must ensure that federal policies do not put our nuclear industry at a disadvantage by imposing unnecessary restrictions or delaying the responsible export of domestic nuclear technologies, especially to our allies. I am concerned that language included in the House Defense Authorization bill may do just that, and will work with my colleagues in the Senate to ensure Part 810 export authorities continue to be used responsibly.

Our nation must also continue to be the major player on the world stage for nuclear energy and it is essential to encourage innovative nuclear technologies, such as advanced reactors and small modular reactors, to be deployed here at home is key.

The theme of your conference really does say it all – Nuclear Works! With 99 reactors providing nearly 20 percent of our nation's power – nuclear is a critical part of the energy mix and it is important that we build on the decades of safe energy production.

What I want to leave you with today is that your industry has many friends and allies in the U.S.

Senate. When I took the gavel of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, I knew that I didn't want to be a passive chairman – the kind of chairman who only reacts to the news of the day – allowing regulators and the courts decide America's energy policy. So we are going to work on legislation, and with your help, we will ensure nuclear has a bright future in this country.

Thank you again for having me here today and I wish you all the very best for a successful conference.

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[Energy.Senate.Gov](http://energy.senate.gov)



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