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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

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SPEECH BY NRC CHAIRMAN

GREGORY JACZKO

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Monday,

July 18, 2011

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Delivered at the
National Press Club
529 14th St. NW
Washington, DC 20045

Introductory remarks by:

MARK HAMRICK, President, National Press Club

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(Time not provided)

1
2
3 MR. HAMRICK: So it is with this news
4 backdrop that we are very pleased to have our guest
5 speaker here today. In May of 2009, President Obama
6 appointed our guest chairman of the NRC, where he had
7 served as Commissioner since 2005.

8 With a doctorate in physics, he learned to
9 navigate the political corridors of power on Capitol
10 Hill, first as a congressional science fellow for
11 Congressman Ed Markey of Massachusetts. His next job,
12 the one he held before joining the NRC, was science
13 advisor to Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid in
14 Nevada.

15 Incidentally, Senator Reid says that he
16 supports building new plants, although he has led the
17 opposition to store waste for those existing and new
18 plants in his state, at Yucca Mountain.

19 Our guest was born in Pennsylvania and
20 grew up in upstate New York. And we're pleased to
21 have him here today to address this timely topic. And
22 I have to say also, I believe he's our first guest
23 speaker who, I just now learned, has a spouse who is a
24 member of the National Press Club, and works for
25 C-SPAN. So we're very happy to have that as well.

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1 Please give a warm National Press Club
2 welcome to NRC chairman Gregory Jaczko.

3 (APPLAUSE)

4 CHAIRMAN JACZKO: Well, I should say after
5 that introduction, at least my wife will be happy with
6 whatever I say today. So, I want to thank you for
7 that introduction. I'm very pleased and honored to be
8 here today, speaking at this venerable institution.

9 The National Press Club is really a venue
10 like no other. It's been the center of Washington
11 journalism and news for more than 100 years. And as I
12 was doing some research preparing for this, and my
13 staff did a little investigation of the press club
14 they noticed that its historic emblem was that of an
15 owl, which symbolizes wisdom, awareness, and long
16 nights spent on the job.

17 Now I won't claim wisdom, and I'll let you
18 judge me sense of awareness, but I can definitely
19 relate to the long nights spent sleepless on the job.

20 As chairman of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission one
21 of the best aspects of my job is having the
22 opportunity to lead a staff of nearly 4,000 talented,
23 dedicated public servants.

24 Like any regulatory agency, we hear from
25 all sides and all perspectives about both our own

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1 safety record and that of the industry we regulate.
2 We know we can always do better, and we always strive
3 to do better. But I have absolute confidence, and I
4 believe that the American should as well, in the
5 experience, expertise and professionalism of the NRC
6 staff.

7 So today I brought three excellent
8 representatives of that team with me, and I'd like to
9 introduce them to you. As you heard, Michelle Catts
10 is someone who has a degree in nuclear engineering and
11 has worked for the NRC for eight years. She currently
12 serves as one of two senior resident inspectors at the
13 Indian Point nuclear power plant in New York.

14 As a resident inspector, she is the eyes
15 and ears of the NRC. She and her fellow resident
16 inspectors are the front line staff who conducted the
17 inspections ordered by the agency in the days
18 following the nuclear accident in Japan.

19 Also with me is Dan Frumkin, who is
20 originally from the D.C. area and has a degree in
21 fire protection engineering from Maryland. After
22 working on fire protection programs for two nuclear
23 plants, he has worked on improving fire protection at
24 nuclear plants all across the country for the past 11
25 years at the NRC. This is a very important and long-

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1 standing issue for the agency, and Mr. Frumkin has
2 been a big part of the NRC's efforts to make progress
3 on this issue.

4 And finally, Jennifer Uhle, who has been
5 with the agency for 18 years. She's got a doctorate
6 in nuclear engineering from MIT. And in fact, the NRC
7 helped provide her the opportunity to pursue those
8 studies. Right now, she helps make decisions on where
9 the NRC spends its research money to best advance the
10 science of nuclear safety.

11 And most recently, Ms. Uhle was part of a
12 24/7 operation center team during the Japan crisis.
13 And because of her expertise, she was asked to serve
14 on the International Atomic Energy Agency's fact
15 finding mission to Japan.

16 These three outstanding professionals are
17 representative of the thousands of individuals who
18 work day in and day out to make sure we meet our
19 responsibilities for nuclear safety to the public.
20 Now I'm sure the recent events in Japan and their
21 implications for how we approach nuclear safety in
22 this country are foremost in everyone's mind.

23 Since the events began to unfold four
24 months ago, the NRC has taken strong and immediate
25 actions to ensure the continued safety of the nation's

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1 nuclear power plants. In light of the events in
2 Japan, the Commission has undertaken a systematic and
3 methodical review of the NRC's nuclear safety program.

4 This review had both short and long-term
5 components. And it has moved forward with a strong
6 sense of urgency, given the significant safety issues
7 under examination.

8 To spearhead this effort, the Commission
9 established a task force made up of the agency's most
10 experienced and expert staff. Altogether, the six
11 members on this task force represent more than 135
12 years of regulatory experience.

13 Throughout its review, the task force has
14 had full access to all of the other staff at NRC
15 headquarters, and in our regions, and ultimately our
16 NRC staff who are continuing to work in Japan to
17 assist the Japanese government as they respond to the
18 situation there.

19 As part of its review, the task force
20 reached out to the Federal Emergency Management Agency
21 to benefit from their expertise in their emergency
22 management, as well as to the Institute for Nuclear
23 Power Operations in order to understand the industry's
24 response to the events in Japan.

25 Additionally, the task force considered

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1 information received from stakeholders, and monitored
2 international efforts and reports by the International
3 Atomic Energy Agency, the Nuclear Energy Agency and
4 other organizations.

5 Last week, this task force completed its
6 90 day review, part of the short-term review assigned
7 to them by the Commission, and submitted its report
8 and recommendations to the Commission for its
9 consideration.

10 In line with the NRC's commitment to
11 transparency and openness, the Commission has made
12 this full report publicly available for everyone to
13 see. The task force will also formally present the
14 report to the Commission at a public meeting tomorrow.

15 And I want to thank the members of the task force for
16 their tremendous work.

17 It's clear that their focus remain first
18 and foremost on nuclear safety. In particular, I want
19 to acknowledge Charlie Miller, who delayed retirement
20 in order to lead this effort. He still has hopes of
21 retiring soon, but we're doing our best to talk him
22 out of it.

23 This task force developed a set of 12
24 recommendations, many with both short- and long-term
25 elements, and they were recommendations that are

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1 needed to strengthen nuclear safety in this country.

2 In its review, the task force did not find
3 any imminent risk to public health and safety from the
4 continued operation of the nation's nuclear power
5 plants. The task force was clear, however, that any
6 accident involving damage to the reactor fuel and
7 uncontrolled radioactive releases of the magnitude of
8 Fukushima, even one without significant health
9 consequences, is inherently unacceptable.

10 This is the same reaction I have seen as I
11 have attended meetings throughout the country and,
12 really, throughout the world. Quite simply, many of
13 us who work in this field thought that this type of
14 accident could not and would not happen again.
15 So the challenge for the congress, the industry, the
16 public and, of course, the Agency is how to better
17 ensure an accident like the one in Japan will not
18 happen in the United States.

19 But like a doctor's Hippocratic Oath, we
20 must ensure that we do that in a way that does no
21 greater harm to nuclear safety. And I think that's
22 something -- and I hope to share with you some
23 thoughts today about how I think we can do that.

24 Now as you can tell, I'm tremendously
25 proud of the work of the task force. They have given

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1 us an excellent starting point with which to tackle
2 this important question and challenge.

3 Over the next 90 days -- just like the
4 task force took 90 days to do their review, I call on
5 the Commission to do its job to systematically and
6 methodically review these recommendations in a public
7 and transparent way, hearing from all of the relevant
8 stakeholders.

9 Regardless of your view on the task force
10 recommendations, this is a step that I think we can
11 all agree on. Now, this is by no means the first time
12 we've contemplated significant changes to our approach
13 to nuclear safety.

14 Throughout the NRC's history, our approach
15 to nuclear safety and security has necessarily evolved
16 as new scientific information and operational
17 experience have given us a better understanding of
18 nuclear technology and its risks.

19 Although this process has primarily
20 unfolded incrementally through piecemeal and patchwork
21 changes along the way, the history of nuclear power
22 has also been punctuated by several significant events
23 that challenged old truths and upended our
24 understanding of nuclear safety and security.

25 In 1975 the Browns Ferry fire occurred at

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1 a nuclear power plant. And this led us to rethink our
2 understanding of fire protection, an issue that we
3 continue to work on to this day.

4 In 1979, the Three Mile Island accident
5 led us to rethink a large number of safety
6 improvements and approaches to safety at nuclear power
7 plants, including a strong focus and emphasis on the
8 control rooms and how people working in those
9 environments could best deal with the challenging
10 situation, like the accident at Three Mile Island.

11 And of course, the September 11th, 2001
12 terrorist attacks were another watershed event that
13 caused us to dramatically rethink how we approach
14 nuclear security in this country.

15 These events led to dramatic changes in
16 both how the NRC regulates and, ultimately, how the
17 nuclear industry operates, changes that remain with us
18 to this day.

19 Based on the task force analysis and
20 recommendations it is clear that the accident at the
21 Fukushima Daiichi site is another such event. In
22 laying out a regulatory framework for the 21st
23 Century, the Commission's task force has charted a
24 path forward on how we can fundamentally strengthen
25 the NRC's nuclear safety program.

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1 Now, these task force recommendations are
2 too extensive for me to fully discuss today. They
3 range in areas from loss of power to earthquakes,
4 flooding, spent fuel pools, venting of hydrogen, and
5 emergency preparedness. They include proposed new
6 requirements for nuclear power plants to evaluate and
7 upgrade their seismic and flooding protection, to
8 strengthen their ability to deal with prolonged loss
9 of power and ultimately to develop emergency plans
10 that specifically contemplate the possibility of
11 events involving multiple reactors.

12 Throughout the report, the task force
13 emphasizes that effective NRC action is essential in
14 addressing these challenges, and that voluntary
15 industry initiatives are no substitute for strong and
16 effective NRC oversight.

17 In addition to these specific
18 recommendations, the task force calls on the
19 Commission to redefine adequate protection in light of
20 what we've learned from Fukushima. Now for those of
21 you who are not steeped in NRC parlance, adequate
22 protection is likely not a familiar term.

23 Ultimately, our statutory responsibility
24 is for safety. It's the touchstone of what we do as
25 regulators. And it is the standard of safety that the

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1 NRC must require nuclear power plants and other
2 licensees in order to allow them to operate.

3 Over the last 25 years, there have been
4 few occasions where the Commission has deemed it
5 necessary to revisit the standard and redefine what
6 safety ultimately means. We did so after September
7 11th, and now the task force, established by the
8 Commission, believes we should do so again, given the
9 insights that the Fukushima accident has provided
10 about rare, catastrophic events.

11 While the decision on whether to redefine
12 this core definition of safety is one for the
13 Commission to ultimately make by examining the task
14 force's recommendations, it's clear that Fukushima was
15 an unacceptable accident and that we need to take
16 strong steps to ensure that that type of accident does
17 not happen in the United States.

18 As we consider and respond to these
19 recommendation the Commission is committed to
20 involving the public and our stakeholders in this
21 process. At the NRC we never forget that nuclear
22 regulation is the public's business and that we have
23 the responsibility to conduct our work openly and
24 transparently.

25 Since my very first speech after joining

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1 the Commission almost seven years ago I have
2 emphasized that openness and transparency are
3 indispensable ingredients for effective decision
4 making. In order to move forward openly and
5 transparently, I have proposed to my Commission
6 colleagues a roadmap for it taking action on this
7 report.

8 The centerpiece of this proposal is a
9 series of public Commission meetings with the NRC
10 staff and the many stakeholders who doubtless will
11 have opinions about the task force report. In the
12 lead up to these meetings, there would be an
13 opportunity for stakeholders to provide feedback on
14 the task force recommendations, and for the NRC staff
15 to provide additional information to the Commission
16 about their thoughts on the task force
17 recommendations.

18 I believe this approach will help insure
19 that the Commission benefits from the information and
20 perspectives that our stakeholders bring to the table.

21 We are in a strong position today to be able to move
22 forward quickly and effectively because the task force
23 did an outstanding job with a tremendously challenging
24 responsibility.

25 The American public should be grateful and

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1 proud of the service that these members have provided.

2 This task force has clearly done its part in helping
3 us to better understand what nuclear safety requires
4 in a post-Fukushima world.

5 Now it is time for my Commission
6 colleagues and me to do our part. We have the
7 responsibility to the American people to diligently
8 and expeditiously review these recommendations and
9 make the best decisions to ensure the continued safety
10 of the public.

11 In light of the task force work, I see no
12 reason why the Commission cannot provide clear
13 direction on each of these recommendations in less
14 than 90 days.

15 That is the time the Commission gave the
16 task force to do its job, and I believe that is more
17 than enough time for the Commission to outline a clear
18 path forward.

19 Now, I don't think that that means that
20 the agency will be able to take final action on all of
21 these matters, since certain of the recommendations
22 themselves are requirements or changes to our
23 regulations that in and of themselves may take months
24 or years to develop.

25 But I believe we have enough information

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1 at this time to take the necessary interim steps on
2 issues identified in the task force, and to initiate
3 the longer-term changes to our regulations that will
4 allow for full and meaningful participation by the
5 public.

6 In order to provide that clear direction
7 within the 90 days, it's up to all of us to think
8 about new ways to do things differently.

9 That should not be unexpected, since these
10 are not normal times for the NRC nor for our
11 licensees. We all know that some changes are in order
12 and none of us want to make rushed, poor decisions.
13 We must move forward, however, with the urgency called
14 for by these safety issues.

15 As chairman, I'm committed to ensuring
16 that the Commission has all the information it needs
17 to make timely decisions and take decisive actions in
18 response to the task force recommendations.

19 As I alluded to earlier in my remarks,
20 this is by no means the first time we have undertaken
21 a significant reevaluation of what nuclear safety and
22 security requires. Nearly a decade ago, we embarked
23 on an effort to overhaul and strengthen the security
24 of the nation's nuclear plants in the aftermath of the
25 September 11th attacks.

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1 While we've moved forward with short-term
2 changes, it has taken the NRC and the industry almost
3 10 years to fully develop and implement the new
4 framework. I believe that it would be unacceptable
5 for our current effort to take that long

6 That is why I'm calling today for the NRC
7 and the nuclear industry to commit to complete and
8 implement the process of learning and applying the
9 lessons of the Fukushima Daiichi accident within five
10 years, by 2016.

11 This will take a lot of hard work, strong
12 and decisive leadership from the Commission, and an
13 even stronger commitment by our licensees to continue
14 to make safety the number one priority.

15 We ultimately have no other choice in this
16 regard. I think the task force has provided an
17 excellent start to this effort and I believe that we
18 are more than up to the task of seeing this effort
19 through

20 Because ultimately, this is not a
21 challenge or a problem for me, or the members of the
22 Commission, or the agency, or the nuclear industry.
23 It is ultimately a challenge for all of us, as we
24 continue to ensure that nuclear power can be used
25 safely and securely in this country.

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1 This is not an NRC problem, or a nuclear
2 industry problem. It is ultimately a nuclear safety
3 imperative. The American people are looking to
4 everyone involved in nuclear safety, from the
5 operators, to the regulators, to the members of the
6 public who participate in our process, to do their
7 part in continuing to protect the public. And this is
8 something I think on which we must deliver.

9 So with that, I thank you for your
10 attention, and I would be happy to answer any
11 questions you might have. Thank you.

12 (Applause)

13 (Whereupon, the above-entitled speech was
14 concluded.)

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