



NEWS FROM BEYOND NUCLEAR

For immediate release

Contact: Linda Pentz Gunter, Beyond Nuclear,
301-455-5655

Video: Expert Hill briefing on nuclear power unaffordability and risks
Scrapping nuclear environmental and safety laws and gambling on data centers will deliver little to nothing and cost taxpayers and ratepayers billions

WASHINGTON, DC, June 5, 2026-- The video recording of the June 2 Hill briefing featuring six leading experts on nuclear costs, risks, laws and regulations, is now available for viewing on YouTube here: <https://youtu.be/bwpN2BBb0vo?si=IYI71A-pVrgj5Hc->.

The event took place on Tuesday, June 2, 2026 in the Russell Senate Building and examined the inherent dangers and unaffordability of the Trump administration's ambitious and unrealistic nuclear power expansion plans.

The speaker line-up featured: **Sharon Squassoni**, George Washington University, former US government official; **Peter Bradford**, former NRC Commissioner; **Edwin Lyman**, physicist, Union of Concerned Scientists; **Joe Romm**, physicist; former Department of Energy official; **Diane Curran**, attorney, litigator vs. NRC; **M.V. Ramana**, physicist, University of British Columbia.

Additional remarks during the Q&A were made by **Tim Judson**, executive director, Nuclear Information & Resource Service and **Paul Gunter**, director of the reactor oversight project, Beyond Nuclear, representing the two hosting organizations. Introductions were made by **Linda Pentz Gunter**, executive director, Beyond Nuclear.

The event was sponsored by Ralph Nader.

The speakers raised concerns about the stripping of safety oversight from the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), and dismissed the Trump administration rationale that a burdensome regulatory environment had hindered the fast-tracking of new reactors. "...the administration has bought into the nonsensical proposition that nuclear power's economic woes are somehow a product of a heavy-handed US safety regimen, despite the fact that the safety regimen was

the product of an industry-sensitive regulatory agency whose 20th-century commissioners were entirely industry-vetted and predominantly appointed by Republican presidents," pointed out former NRC commissioner, Peter Bradford.

Joe Romm, a former energy official, noted that the hype around small modular reactors masks the reality "that they don't exist. I apologize for talking about a hypothetical, fanciful science fiction experiment that no country in the world has ever successfully completed. That is to say, the commercialization of a small modular reactor."

Concerns had been raised after Trump's announcement that weapons-grade plutonium could be assigned to new commercial reactors for use in fuel. A preferable alternative, said Ed Lyman of Union of Concerned Scientists, would be to dilute, dispose of and bury surplus plutonium underground. "Now, that cheaper and safer alternative has been abandoned in lieu of this half-baked idea that this 20 metric tons of plutonium can be quickly converted into fuel as a bridge fuel," Lyman said. "The idea that plutonium could actually be used more quickly than uranium fuel is absurd because of the complexity, the attention to safety and security that a plutonium fuel facility would actually require."

The rush to build AI data centers has brought with it an insistence by some of the major tech companies that they should be powered by new "small modular" or "advanced" reactors. But the timing of the two are not complementary given the long lead times for new reactors, said Sharon Squassoni, a former State Department official and longtime non-proliferation scholar.

"If you want AI dominance, you need power now," Squassoni said. "It's in the newspaper on the front page every day. Nuclear power is not going to supply that. Not in the next five years, maybe not even in ten years."

Environmental laws, including the National Environmental Policy Act are now in jeopardy, even as climate conditions worsen, putting nuclear plants at greater risk. And yet, as attorney Diane Curran noted, the NRC is refusing to factor future climate conditions as it continues to extend reactor licenses and issue new ones. "Climate change must be accounted for in reactor licensing because it challenges the NRC's ability to ensure safe operation over the decades of a license term," Curran said. "Weather-related hazards, including floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, derechos, wildfires, and drought are becoming more severe and more frequent."

Physicist M.V. Ramana reminded the audience that none of the designs proposed for the "new" smaller or "advanced" reactors are actually new. Most of the designs date back to the 1940s and '50s he said, and are simply being re-adapted. "They modify it a little bit, use a new alloy for this. Use a slightly different design for the steam generator, and lo and behold, you have a new

reactor design," Ramana said. "There's a lot of hype here". But, he added, when the companies are talking about all the expenditures, "they are using not their energy budget, but their PR budget."

New reactor developers claim that their designs are "safe" and even "meltdown-proof", but they still demanded indemnification under the Price-Anderson Act, which caps liability for the industry in the event of a major accident. This "actually turns out to be a vote of no confidence when the industry's given the cover of the federal taxpayer in the event of a severe nuclear accident," said Paul Gunter, director of the reactor oversight project at Beyond Nuclear.

The absence of liability and the removal of NRC oversight, said Romm, puts us in "very dangerous territory of maximum moral hazard. Because the question is, who cares about whether these reactors don't actually work and actually go awry? That is the central question. Obviously, the Price-Anderson Act guarantees that the people who build the reactor are not liable if things go wrong. A DOE loan indemnifies all of the investors, so they don't care if anything goes wrong. The only organization, the only body that actually oversees and, in theory, cares about whether something goes wrong is the Nuclear Regulatory Commission."

The panelists expressed concerns about the rollback of regulations that will transfer oversight in some cases from the NRC in favor of the US Department of Energy. "The reason why we felt it was important to have this briefing now is because the NRC is rolling out this wholesale revision of its regulations through these various rule changes that are coming down in the next few months," said Tim Judson, executive director of Nuclear Information and Resource Service.