

U.S. SENATOR CHRIS VAN HOLLEN
STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD
SUBSTITUTE AMENDMENT TO S. 4897, AMERICAN NUCLEAR
INFRASTRUCTURE ACT OF 2020

Mr. VAN HOLLEN: Mr. Chairman, I am glad that the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee came together on a bipartisan basis to pass legislation that will strengthen our nuclear nonproliferation and export control policy, sustain the existing fleet of nuclear reactors, and facilitate the development of advanced reactor designs. On balance, with the inclusion of my amendment, this bill serves our nonproliferation interests and I believe it expands our carbon-free energy options. But there are number of troubling provisions that I would seek to amend as it moves forward and through the appropriations process.

I appreciate that my colleagues on the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee adopted my amendment to reinforce nonproliferation and nuclear security guardrails for the new generation of nuclear reactors and fuels. Facilitating the development and eventual export of advanced nuclear technologies must only proceed in tandem with steadfast efforts to stop the spread of nuclear weapons and thwart nuclear terrorism. My amendment prevents foreign buyers from misusing or diverting U.S.-made nuclear technologies for weapons purposes or from leaving them vulnerable to theft or sabotage. I will build on this effort in the new Congress next year and ensure that our nuclear export policy converges with our nonproliferation goals.

I also appreciate ANIA's provision to establish a credit program for nuclear power plants facing potential closure due to economic headwinds. Generating approximately 20% of our country's electricity and over half of our carbon-free energy, nuclear power is an essential prong in our efforts to achieve net zero carbon emissions and mitigate the impacts of climate change. This bill, through the extension of credit incentives, would keep our existing fleet of nuclear reactors safely operating online and contributing clean energy to the grid. Additionally, it will help level the playing field for safe nuclear power plants that compete against carbon emitting natural gas plants backed by federal subsidies. While it is outside of the scope of this bill, I would urge my colleagues to maintain and, in some cases expand, tax incentives and other financial support for other key parts of our clean energy sector, including solar and wind, efficiency, and energy storage, that face challenges and can be powerful drivers of economic growth.

Yet, while I am voting to pass the bill from the Committee, I do have significant reservations.

Above all, I oppose ANIA's provision to create an unnecessary and costly domestic uranium reserve, and I cosponsored an amendment to strike this provision from the bill. Given the abundant supply of uranium in the market and our country's large stocks of uranium for defense needs, there is no economic, technical, or strategic reason to establish this reserve. Expanding uranium mining operations at this juncture will only cause further environmental damage, imperil the health and safety of mining-impacted communities, and inject unnecessary volatility into uranium markets. ANIA's provision allocates no funding for the reserve's establishment, and I will oppose through the appropriations process any funding for this purpose. Furthermore, I will work with my colleagues on the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee to protect communities across the country suffering from the environmental fallout of uranium

mining. I also share the interest of many of my colleagues on the Committee in providing maximum support to assist nuclear communities that have been hit hard by the closure of nuclear power plants.

I am disappointed that this bill fails to overturn the budget caps – codified in the Nuclear Energy and Modernization Act – on the Nuclear Regulatory Commission’s (NRC) corporate support costs. Setting artificial limits on the amount of money the NRC can request in its budget to carry out important functions, like human resources management, personnel background investigations, and information technology services, risks straining the NRC’s budget and compounding staffing issues at the Commission. As the regulatory agency charged with ensuring that our nuclear power plants operate safely and securely, the NRC must be fully equipped to carry out its functions.

While I oppose some of the provisions in this bill and am disappointed by its failure to address certain issues, on the whole, ANIA will underpin a strong nonproliferation policy, advance efforts to expand alternatives to carbon-emitting fuels, and help combat climate change. For that reason, I voted in support of passing the bill out of Committee. As ANIA continues on its legislative journey through the Senate and House, I will work to protect the important provisions of this bill and remove those that are counterproductive.