



July 17, 2025

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Hon. Robert Rivas, California Assembly Speaker
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Hon. Mike McGuire, California Senate President Pro Tempore
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SUBJECT: *Action needed to address Diablo Canyon safety risks posed by Trump
Administration deregulation of NRC*

Dear Gov. Newsom and Messrs. Hochschild, Rivas, and McGuire:

We urge your immediate attention to recent Trump Administration actions abruptly and decisively undermining any basis for confidence in the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) to effectively oversee the safety of the aging and earthquake-vulnerable Diablo Canyon nuclear reactors. Mr. Hochschild, as the Chair of the California Energy Commission and the official appointed by Gov. Newsom to act as State Liaison to the NRC, we especially call upon you to give this urgent matter your immediate attention for purposes of advising the Governor.

While [S.B. 846 \(2022\)](#) financed a five-year extended operating license term for the twin reactors formerly scheduled to close in 2024/2025, the financing is conditioned on two assumptions about the rigor and effectiveness of NRC oversight: (1) that the NRC will not grant Pacific Gas & Electric Company's (PG&E's) pending license renewal application until it is satisfied with the reactors' safety via a thorough safety and environmental review (Section 25548.3(c)(5)) and (2) that any "seismic safety or other safety modifications" required by the NRC will not prove too costly to justify continued operation (Section 25548.3(c)(9)).

Instead of maintaining or improving the NRC's regulatory program for carrying out these duties and generally protecting public health and safety and the environment, the Trump Administration has elevated production of nuclear energy over safety, [installed DOGE overseers](#) at the top of the agency to slash staffing levels, ordered arbitrary reductions in regulations, sought to raise the

limits on human radiation exposure, and fired or forced the retirement of the Commission's strongest safety advocate and other experienced and safety-conscious senior staff.

To be clear, the Administration's actions – which include an explicit statement that the NRC is expected to “[rubber stamp](#)” licensing requests – go well beyond the pro-nuclear bias that has concerned us for decades. Instead, the Trump Administration is actively and openly gutting the NRC as an independent safety regulator and rendering it subservient to the Administration's political aims.

Key among the destructive Trump Administration actions is [Executive Order 14300](#) (May 23, 2025), which:

- Orders the NRC to promote nuclear energy rather than exclusively focus on safety (Section 1), *thereby undermining the 1974 Energy Reorganization Act's signal achievement of separating the inconsistent functions of safety regulation and promotion — both formerly assigned to the Atomic Energy Commission — into two separate agencies, NRC (safety regulator) and the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) (nuclear energy promoter).*
- Orders an increase in U.S. nuclear energy capacity from approximately 100 GW in 2024 to 400 GW by 2050, in part by “[s]upport[ing] the continued operation of, and facilitate appropriate operational extensions for, the current nuclear fleet” (Section 2), *thereby putting pressure on the NRC to keep Diablo Canyon running to meet the President's quota, regardless of costs or safety risks;*
- Orders the NRC to consider “the benefits” of nuclear power in its “licensing and related regulatory functions” (Section 3), *thereby eroding the NRC's ability to shield important safety decisions from industry pressure to cut costs;*
- Allows DOGE to direct “reductions in force” (Section 4) *thereby undermining NRC's ability to determine what level of staffing is needed to provide for adequate oversight;*
- Requires the NRC to work with DOGE, OMB, and “other executive departments” on a “wholesale reduction” in regulations (Section 5), *once again undermining the NRC's independence in determining the necessary content of its regulations.*

We share the [deep concern](#) of Dr. Robert Budnitz, a long-time member of the State's Diablo Canyon Independent Safety Committee (DCISC) (an arm of the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC)) and formerly head of the NRC's Office of Research, that these measures could have long-term impacts on the ability and effectiveness of the NRC to oversee the safety of Diablo Canyon.

We also note that the current Commissioners have fallen into line in response to the Administration's draconian measures without protest, [tepidly stating](#) that they are now in an “unprecedented position” requiring them to “navigate [a] dynamic environment.” More accurately, as [observed by U.S. Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse](#), “rogue operators” have engineered a “hostile takeover” of the NRC. And harmful changes are happening rapidly. Indeed, only weeks after the issuance of Executive Order 14300, the NRC has responded to the order to relax long-established safety-based maximum radiation dose limits by [scheduling a public meeting](#) to take input on “changes to our guidance and regulations.” The relaxation of existing minimum

radiation standards for operating nuclear reactors such as Diablo Canyon could seriously degrade public health and safety.

Finally, in perhaps the Administration's most chilling blow to the NRC's independent oversight of Diablo Canyon, President Trump — without cause — [fired](#) NRC Commissioner Christopher Hanson, a vocal safety advocate who in 2023 made a [public commitment](#) to U.S. Sen. Alex Padilla to conduct a thorough evaluation of seismic risks to Diablo Canyon as a condition of re-licensing. Mr. Hanson may have been targeted for a recent [speech](#) in which he advocated three “core values” fundamental to the NRC: “independence, technical competence, and protection of the public.” As [warned](#) by a former NRC Commissioner and other senior agency officials, the firing of Mr. Hanson “endangers the independence of the NRC as it raises the specter of political considerations carrying greater weight than public health and safety.” Pacific Gas & Electric Company recently acknowledged that an active thrust fault lies directly beneath the plant whose capacity [has not been fully assessed](#). Under the circumstances, you may be assured that the likelihood the NRC will follow up Mr. Hanson's commitment to fully assess the seismic risk to Diablo Canyon in light of this active thrust fault has been rendered nil.

We respectfully submit to you that as described by Sen. Whitehouse, the Trump Administration is now “unraveling” the NRC as a “credible independent regulator” that once treated public safety as “paramount.” This assault on the integrity and independence of the NRC has created a crisis that demands immediate action by you as the top State officials responsible for protecting the citizens of California. The safety and environmental risks posed by operating these reactors in the absence of effective federal oversight is unacceptable, especially given the [questionable condition of the Unit 1 pressure vessel](#) (which has not been inspected for twenty years) and the recently-disclosed fact that both reactors sit atop an active thrust fault whose capacity [has not been fully assessed](#).

Three years ago, in passing S.B. 846, the Legislature included a key guardrail: NRC oversight of Diablo Canyon's safety and seismic integrity. S.B. 846 looked to the NRC not only for purposes of protecting public health and safety and the environment, but also to provide the CPUC with insights on what it would cost to keep the reactors safe, so that they can determine whether continued operation is cost-effective. Likewise, S.B. 846 assigned considerable weight to the DCISC's function of advising the CPUC on safety matters affecting Diablo Canyon costs, adding import to the concerns voiced by Dr. Budnitz. The recent evisceration of the NRC by the Trump Administration compromises the CPUC's ability to adequately fulfill either role.

Fortunately, you have no need to continue to place unwarranted confidence in the NRC during the five-year extended operation of Diablo Canyon approved in S.B. 846. Since S.B. 846 was passed, California has [added significantly more energy to the grid along with an unprecedented amount of storage](#). There is no need to continue to pour ratepayer and taxpayer funds into the continued operation of these aging and earthquake-vulnerable reactors. You have at your disposal the means to release the State from its dangerous dependence on the NRC and make California a more sustainable, less expensive and less risky place to live and do business by closing the Diablo Canyon reactors. We urge you to expeditiously take all necessary steps to achieve that result.

Sincerely,

/s/Jane Swanson

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