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NRC overhaul and departures prompt fears of slowing process

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The NRC logo. Photo: Andrew Hurrell / Bloomberg via Getty Images

The White House's reshaping of the NRC has created a cloud of uncertainty that risks undermining President Trump's [goal](#) of approving more nuclear reactors, according to some observers.

Why it matters: The public's confidence could be shattered if there's a perception that the NRC is paying more attention to political influence than nuclear safety expertise, nearly a dozen NRC experts and industry officials told me.

- The latest upheaval came Tuesday when Commissioner Annie Caputo announced her resignation "to more fully focus on my family."

Driving the news: The commission recently installed a DOGE staffer amid high-level departures, including Trump's [firing](#) of a Democratic commissioner. The White House is conducting reviews aimed at overhauling its operations.

- "I would quite honestly worry a bit about the morale," said Stephen Burns, who chaired the commission from 2015 to 2017 as an independent.
- The NRC has lost staffers who would have implemented changes to speed things up, said Adam Stein, director of the Breakthrough Institute's Nuclear Energy Innovation program.
- "You now have people who are less likely to join the NRC because they are concerned about their employment at the agency," Stein said. "That doesn't enable positive rapid change."

One source with direct knowledge of the NRC's inner workings — who spoke on condition of anonymity — contended that nuclear companies "are scared out of their minds that all the chaos at the agency is going to delay them [and] is going to undermine public confidence in their designs and their projects."

The big picture: Trump's [executive orders](#) backing nuclear power envision the Energy and Defense departments deploying reactors on federal sites within three years.

- One [order](#) calls for NRC to consult with DOGE to "reorganize the NRC to promote the expeditious processing of license applications and the adoption of innovative technology."

The new requirement for NRC regulations to get a White House review — a step intended to ensure alignment with administration priorities — has introduced a level of micromanagement that cloaks the process in secrecy and adds another bureaucratic step, according to some observers who spoke on condition of anonymity.

The other side: NRC's work with DOE and DOD "reflects a broader commitment to cutting red tape, not corners," commission spokesperson Scott Burnell said.

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- "This is a smarter, more coordinated use of government resources, not a shortcut."

Zoom in: Democratic Commissioner Christopher Hanson [was fired](#) last month. NRC's executive director for operations [departed](#) and was succeeded by an [acting director](#).

- The Senate on Monday confirmed David Wright, Trump's pick to chair the commission, along a party-line vote for another five-year term.
- Adam Blake, a California technology executive, has been installed as the DOGE-embedded executive director of operations.

Between the lines: Senate Environment and Public Works Chair Shelley Moore Capito has betrayed [little public concern](#) about NRC but acknowledged Democratic concerns about its independence this month.

- EPW Ranking Member Sheldon Whitehouse said Democrats believed Wright was qualified for the role but couldn't endorse DOE and DOGE "infiltrating the NRC, compromising its integrity."
- The administration, he added, is "starting to feel some pressure from Senate Republicans that — whether this is a hostile takeover by the Department of Energy or just childish wreckage being done by the DOGE-y characters — it's a mistake."

