SENATE NELA OFFERS NEEDED ADVANCED NUCLEAR BLUEPRINT

WASHINGTON, Sept. 6, 2018 -- A bipartisan group of senators led by Energy and Natural Resources Chairman Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska) and Sen. Cory Booker (D-N.J.) have introduced a comprehensive blueprint for the U.S. to once again lead the world in next-generation nuclear power.

The Nuclear Energy Leadership Act (NELA) addresses the lack of aggressive yet achievable milestones for U.S.-led advanced reactor technologies and of an overall long-term strategy for the direction of U.S. nuclear science and engineering research and development.

“NELA is a broad and bold step toward developing the federal goals and public-private partnerships necessary to traverse the dreaded valley of death that often stops groundbreaking nuclear innovation from winning in the marketplace,” ClearPath Action Executive Director Rich Powell said. “It’s also another great example of the bipartisan support on Capitol Hill for forging ahead with the next-generation of clean and reliable nuclear technologies that China, Russia and others are trying to corner the global market on.”

Original cosponsors include Republicans James Risch (Idaho), Shelley Moore Capito (W.Va.) and Mike Crapo (Idaho) and Democrats Richard Durbin (Ill.), Joe Manchin (W.Va.), Sheldon Whitehouse (R.I.) and Chris Coons (Del.).

The bill (S. 3422) would direct the Department of Energy to establish specific goals to align the federal government, national labs and private sector in efforts to accelerate advanced nuclear technologies. The language echoes the Advanced Nuclear Energy Technologies Act (S. 1457) from Sen. Jeff Flake (R-Ariz.) and Booker, which the Senate energy panel approved in March.

NELA would also require DOE's Office of Nuclear Energy to develop a 10-year strategic plan that supports advanced nuclear R&D goals. NELA addresses the lack of domestic supply of high-assay low-enriched uranium (HA-LEU), which will be needed to fuel virtually any advanced reactor being designed.

NELA establishes a program to provide a minimum amount of HA-LEU to U.S. advanced reactor developers from DOE stockpiles until a new long-term supply is developed. ClearPath Action advisor and former NRC Commissioner Jeffrey Merrifield co-authored a recent white paper sponsored by ClearPath and USNIC that urged lawmakers, policymakers and the NRC to take prompt steps to ensure adequate supply of HA-LEU or risk continued progress in deploying the next generation of U.S. nuclear power.

Advanced fuels and materials will also need a reliable testing ground. NELA directs DOE to construct a fast neutron research facility that is necessary to test reactor components and demonstrate their safe and reliable operation. Currently, the only machines capable of producing a fast neutron spectrum are located in Russia and China. Similar language was included in the Senate-approved Nuclear Energy Innovation Capabilities Act (S. 97).

The bill also initiates a long-term power purchase agreement pilot between the DOE and utilities to procure nuclear power. The final portion of the bill reauthorizes nuclear engineering scholarships to maintain a robust pipeline of nuclear engineering talent.

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About ClearPath Action

Founded by businessman Jay Faison, ClearPath Action's mission is to accelerate conservative clean energy solutions. To advance the mission, ClearPath Action develops cutting-edge policy and messaging and works with policymakers and industry. Find out more at www.clearpathaction.org. Follow us on Twitter: @JayFaison1, @powellrich, @ClearPathAction