

Statement of Representative Henry A. Waxman
October 3, 2001

Today, the Committee takes up legislation to help make the nation's commercial nuclear reactors more secure.

This legislation is non controversial. In fact, the Committee reported this legislation during the last Congress by voice vote. It is modest legislation, and I suppose it made sense to report it when we did almost two years ago.

But the world changed on September 11, and the Committee is not moving forward in a way that shows an understanding of this. Just three weeks ago, the nation endured the most tragic terrorist attack of its history. These terrorists demonstrated a level of sophistication, funding, and commitment that our airports and airlines were frankly unprepared for.

I want to make sure that this doesn't happen with the nation's 103 commercial nuclear reactors. But we have reason to be concerned, and this legislation should not provide a great deal of comfort.

Over the past month, the press has reported the sorry state of security at commercial nuclear facilities. Apparently, these facilities are often unable to defend against an attack by even the smallest group of attackers. That means we should be particularly concerned about an attack at the level of competency and commitment displayed in the September 11 attacks.

This week's Newsweek has a disturbing article on the effect of a suicide attack on a domestic nuclear reactor.

To be honest, the Committee doesn't really know the details of this issue. We haven't held any hearings, or had any briefings. In fact, we will hear what the Nuclear Regulatory Commission has to say about security this afternoon -- after the bill has already been reported.

And tomorrow, the Energy and Air Quality Subcommittee is planning on marking up a reauthorization of the Price-Anderson Act which in effect provides billions in subsidies for new commercial nuclear reactors throughout the country.

Mr. Chairman, in the coming months, it is essential that our legislative responses be thoughtful, carefully responsive to actual problems, and effective. The bill we will report today is non controversial, but it is also inconsequential.

Mr. Markey will offer a number of amendments to improve the legislation. I will support these amendments, and I urge all members to support them as well.

I hope we can work together to meaningfully address the vulnerability of the nation's nuclear reactors to terrorist attack.