



NRC NEWS

U.S. NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION

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No. 07-112

Sept. 2, 2007

EDWARD McGAFFIGAN JR., LONGEST-SERVING NRC COMMISSIONER, DIES

Edward McGaffigan Jr., the longest serving member of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) and a public servant for more than 31 years, died today at Capital Hospice in Arlington, Va., after a long battle with melanoma. He was 58.

A Boston native and self-described John Kennedy Democrat, McGaffigan was appointed to the Commission by President Clinton in 1996 and 2000, and by President Bush in 2005. In October 2005, he began an unprecedented third term on the commission that regulates the safety and security of nuclear materials and nuclear power plants. On Nov. 3, 2006, he became the panel's longest serving member. Then, on Dec. 8, 2006, he marked 10 years of service to the NRC. His death followed the 11th anniversary of his first swearing-in by a matter of days.

In his tenure at the agency he focused on improving the effectiveness and efficiency of agency processes dealing with reactor oversight and reactor license renewals, and since Sept. 11, 2001, he helped design an enhanced security posture at the nation's 104 commercial nuclear power reactors and other NRC licensees. He took great pride in the fact that the agency, beginning in the late 1990s, became a more disciplined, higher achieving organization, and also took pride in the stability having a full slate of five members gave the agency's efforts after Sept. 11.

"Ed was talented, highly motivated and a person of strong values. He always took the view of what is best for the American people, not what might bring attention to himself. Our prayers are with his family," said NRC Chairman Dale Klein.

Former Chairman Nils Diaz, who served with McGaffigan for almost 10 years on the independent agency, added, "Ed, above all, wanted to serve our nation with distinction and with a passion to do what was better for the common good. He did just that for over 30 years. Our nation is better for his many contributions and everyone of us is better for working with him."

Months before his death, the American Nuclear Society (ANS) and the Nuclear Energy Institute awarded him the prestigious Henry DeWolf Smyth Nuclear Statesman Award. Too ill to travel, he accepted in videotaped remarks shown at the awards ceremony. He was awarded the NRC's highest honor, the Distinguished Service Award, in November 2006, and also was honored with the ANS's Distinguished Public Service Award.

Before joining the Commission, McGaffigan was a legislative assistant and then legislative director to Sen. Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M., working on defense policy, personnel and acquisition reform, non-proliferation and export control policy.

“Ed McGaffigan was a man of great intellect and vision. He understood policy and politics, which made him an extraordinary public servant. Ed made a great contribution to me in my efforts in the Senate during the time he worked with me. He was universally respected and admired for his ability and integrity. I have lost a great friend and trusted counselor,” Bingaman said.

In January 2007, when it appeared he would not be able to defeat the melanoma, McGaffigan announced that he would leave the NRC if the Senate could quickly confirm a successor. But in late March he wrote President Bush that he would stay on because the chemotherapy he was undergoing had slowed the progression of the disease.

Not shy and known for his bluntness, McGaffigan once said he “called them as I saw them because it led me where the truth was.” He often bluntly and publicly challenged agency critics he believed were fear-mongering and misusing science to advance their causes. He was highly critical of the management of the proposed high-level nuclear waste repository at Yucca Mountain, Nev., arguing that if the project had long-term stable management it would be more efficient. He continued to work on the issues that counted to him – particularly improving agency efficiency – from the day he first was diagnosed, and worked on them as he could until his death.

McGaffigan's wife of 18 years, Peggy Weeks McGaffigan, passed away after a long, debilitating illness in 2000. He is survived by a son, Edward Francis, and a daughter, Margaret Ruth McGaffigan, both of Arlington, Va.; his mother, Margaret McGaffigan of Boston; sister Kathleen McGaffigan of Boston; and brother Brien (cq) of Nashua, N.H.

(Editors, while the NRC's five-year terms run July 1 to June 30, it is not unusual for an appointment to be confirmed after July 1 or there to be breaks in service between terms.)

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