Remarks of Maria Korsnick
NEI Nuclear Energy Assembly
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Good morning, again, everyone. I'm honored to welcome all of you to celebrate A New Momentum for nuclear energy.

We brought this year's Nuclear Energy Assembly to Washington for a reason: to connect practitioners with policymakers to advocate for nuclear's future.

Because who's a better advocate for nuclear's future than you? Nobody.

You see all sides of our industry firsthand. You're the reason nuclear is more efficient than ever and getting more so every day. You're why our capacity factor and generation has never been higher – and why our operations costs haven't been this low in 15 years.

You, the next generation of entrepreneurs, are the reason we're able to take plants built 40 years ago and upgrade them with today's technology. You're making it possible for the first-ever second license renewal applications, which can extend a plant's lifespan to 80 years.

You, the next generation of innovators, are the reason Pepper the Robot can make our plants safer and more efficient. And you're the ones developing and supporting small- and micro-reactors to bring nuclear to places it hasn't been before.

You, the next generation of clean energy producers, are the reason nuclear represents more than 55 percent of our emissions-free energy. And why experts from MIT to Google to the government have said we need to grow all clean sources of electricity, including nuclear.

One of the reasons we've achieved some success is because so many of you were fed up with seeing the climate crisis worsen. And you stepped up to do something about it.

Mara Levy, a young professional at Exelon, is one of them. She became an engineer to slow climate change's negative impact on our planet. She wants people to understand that clean energy is part of how we fight back – and that it doesn't just come from wind turbines, hydro-plants, and solar farms. It also comes from nuclear power, the largest source of zero-carbon energy in the United States.

Mara is excited about her opportunity to contribute, and I'm excited that she's on our team. I know that so many of you joined the nuclear workforce for the same reason. You understand the value of nuclear. You are driving a new momentum to protect our energy, economy, and environment.

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There's a simple reason for nuclear's new momentum: it's never been better.

Nuclear is more efficient than ever and it's getting more so every day. Today, we operate at more than 92 percent capacity. A generation ago, we were at only 63 percent. And what's even more remarkable is that it now takes only 97 nuclear reactors to produce what a few decades ago would have taken 130.

Nuclear is responsible for a fifth of this nation's total electricity. That's even more impressive when you consider that out of the 8,000 power plants connected to the grid, less than one percent of them are nuclear plants. So we're punching way above our weight.

On top of the 100,000 good-paying jobs in our industry, nuclear is also indirectly responsible for nearly half a million jobs and half a billion dollars in economic activity each year.

Our plants don't just generate power; they act as economic engines for the communities they serve.

To fully appreciate how important nuclear is to this country, you have to understand how it stacks up. We produced over 800 million megawatt hours of nuclear energy last year – that's the most ever.

Picture this: if you wanted to match nuclear's production with utility solar, you couldn't just double or triple the number of solar panels. You couldn't even quadruple it. You'd have to multiply last year's solar output by twelve.

And if you wanted to match nuclear's production with wind, you'd need three times as many turbines.

This is the catch: the sun doesn't always shine. The wind doesn't always blow. But nuclear feeds the grid around the clock. It's firm. It's dispatchable. It's constant. And it's carbon-free.

We all know what it takes to operate an electric grid. You need to balance supply and demand at all times. You need all of these sources, working together.

So it's clear: we need nuclear.

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We need your passion and energy more than ever to ensure that nuclear remains a part of our future. We don't want to miss this opportunity.

This is not to say we are not an industry without real challenges. I know that right now, many of you are thinking of recent developments, including the closure of Pilgrim last week, the imminent closure of Three Mile Island later this year, and many other planned closures in the coming years. I am, too.

And so are leaders around the world. I was just at the Clean Energy Ministerial, a meeting of global energy ministers. Just two years ago, this meeting barely mentioned nuclear. Now it is a central part of the discussion.

Two weeks ago, the International Energy Agency sent a dire warning: it said that if we don't invest more in nuclear, the climate crisis gets worse. If we allow nuclear generation to drop by two-thirds, the IEA said, carbon emissions will rise by 4 billion tons in the next two decades.

The IEA joined the chorus: we have to fight to keep our plants open, to extend the life of operating plants through subsequent license renewals, and for more nuclear innovation.

That's why your role in nuclear advocacy is more important and more urgent than ever before.

I was in high school when the Three-Mile Island accident happened. Even though the plant was safely shut down, it concerned and confused people. I remember thinking, "I don't ever want to be in a position where I don't understand the plant that I live near, or what it's doing, and whether or not it's dangerous."

That drive to understand the unknown inspired me to study nuclear engineering in college. It was the best decision I ever made. I started out as an engineer, then became an operator, and worked in a control room for many years. I was ultimately responsible for five reactors as a chief nuclear officer at Constellation Energy.

I learned a lot in those jobs – including how much our country and the world needs nuclear. And I realized that nuclear doesn't always get the attention and appreciation it deserves.

This is a problem for our industry. Too many don't see the value of nuclear like we do. Now more than ever, it's our job to show them. We have to help them see the benefits of nuclear from their perspective.

With our new momentum comes new hope for nuclear's future. But if we want the future we know nuclear energy can bring, we have to make it happen. We have to go to the Hill, to our state legislatures, and to our governors and make our case.

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So how do we do it?

By telling your story – the one *only you* can tell.

Why do you work in this industry? Is it because of national security? American leadership? Technological innovation? Public health? Clean air?

Why did you become an engineer? Why did you choose to work in the nuclear industry? Why are you a nuclear advocate? If you want others to care about how much you know, you have to let them know how much you care. You have to share your journey.

If you're like Mara Levy and you got into nuclear to help save the planet, tell that story.

If you're like NAYGN's Amanda Lang, who studied the world's energy crisis as a 7th grader and realized that nuclear is the only energy source that is clean, reliable, dispatchable and abundant – and then decided to become an engineer – you have to tell that story.

Or if you've been fighting on behalf of the industry for more than 50 years, like Jay Silberg, you have to tell your story.

Jay's legal work has helped stopped the federal government from collecting payments on a nuclear waste storage program that never materialized, won utilities hundreds of millions of dollars for long-term waste storage they've been forced to install as a result, and helped license a third of U.S. nuclear plants.

Each one of you has a story. You've got to share that first-hand knowledge as professionals. You've got to give policy-makers and decision-makers the chance walk in your shoes.

And you also have to walk in theirs. When you educate and advocate, consider how your story connects to your legislator's needs. What are they trying to do for their constituents? What are their public health concerns? What are their security concerns? What are their energy needs? And how can nuclear help solve those problems?

The most successful advocates don't just think, "How can this person help me?"

They think: "How can I help them?"

Senator Lisa Murkowski has been such a strong partner for us because she understands exactly how important nuclear is for her state of Alaska. It's

challenging to meet electricity needs in remote areas. But nuclear innovations like micro reactors can replace expensive diesel, and that can improve our health in the process.

It's all about finding common ground.

I know it can seem daunting. You walk into a lawmaker's office in the middle of their busy day, and you have to make every minute count. You are expected to be an expert in everything. So I've got some good news for you: You don't have to be.

This is where Nuclear Energy Institute can help. We have talking points. We have state fact sheets. We have data about plant performance, safety, carbon emissions avoided, finances, new construction, and more. We are to your advocacy what our friend Pepper the Robot is to plant safety and efficiency.

Here's something else to remember: your audiences aren't experts either. That means your story and your argument has to be more than understandable – it has to be repeatable.

If you're working with a staffer, your measure of success is whether that staffer can turn around and make the case to his or her boss. If you're speaking with a legislator, it's whether that legislator can turn around and make the case to his or her committee chair or party leader. Being an advocate is all about turning your audience into advocates, too.

If the only thing we needed to convince Congress were facts and figures, we could just send Pepper to the Hill. But that's not how advocacy works.

It will always require a human interaction, telling your story, connecting it to someone else's needs, and backing it up with evidence.

That is why we need your voice.

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Effective advocacy takes preparation. So start by thinking about why nuclear matters to you. About why it matters to your legislators. And about the evidence that supports your stories. That's how you'll succeed.

We've never needed your advocacy more than we do right now. I hope you'll use this time in D.C. to share your story with the lawmakers who need to hear it, to help them understand how nuclear impacts every aspect of our lives.

I hope you meet one another and help each other become the most effective advocates you can be.

And I invite you to use NEI as a resource to educate and then turn that knowledge into action.

The work you do every day to generate emissions-free, reliable energy is good for planet Earth. It's good for our country and it's good for our communities.

That's the work we're doing.

We all have different stories, different reasons for coming to this career and this conference today. But I bet we have at least one thing in common: we all believe that nuclear is about the future.

It's about our children and grandchildren and generations to come. I want them to be able to look back in 20 or 30 years and say, "I'm glad that they fought so hard for nuclear when it mattered the most."

Now is the time. Thank you.

[Step away from podium]

Before I introduce our first speaker, I would love to hear from a few of you. What is your story? Why did you get involved with nuclear?

[Call on two or three attendees]

Thank you for your stories. Have a great conference! And, thank you again.