

Democrat Steps Down From Nuclear Panel

MATTHEW DALY, Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — William Magwood, a member of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission whose criticism helped lead to the ousting of the agency's former chairman, said Wednesday he soon will be leaving the five-member commission.

Magwood, 52, a Democrat, has served on the NRC since 2010. He was one of four commissioners — two Democrats and two Republicans — who wrote to the White House in 2011, complaining that then-NRC Chairman Gregory Jaczko was a bully responsible for a tense and unsettled work environment, and that women at the NRC felt particularly threatened.

The letter said the four commissioners had "grave concerns" about Jaczko, adding that his bullying style was "causing serious damage" to the agency's mission to protect health and safety at the nation's 104 commercial nuclear reactors.

Jaczko, a Democrat, announced his resignation in May 2012, ahead of a report by the agency's inspector general that largely upheld his fellow commissioners' complaints.

Magwood is set to start in September as director general of the Paris-based Nuclear Energy Agency, an arm of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, an intergovernmental organization of 31 countries in Europe, North America and Asia.

Magwood called the post a tremendous honor and said he appreciated the Obama administration's "strong support" for his nomination. "I will take with me the vital lessons I have learned from my time at the finest safety regulator in the world," the NRC, he said in a statement.

Magwood served on the NRC during the March 2011 disaster at the Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear plant in Japan, and he traveled to Japan to assess damage and visit other nuclear plants. He voted along with colleagues in favor of changes in U.S. policy intended to ensure safety of commercial nuclear reactors.

But it was his public criticism of Jaczko that drew the most attention on Capitol Hill and at the White House.

In a stunning public rebuke, Magwood and three other commissioners sat next to Jaczko in December 2011 and told Congress that the NRC chairman was an intimidating bully whose actions could compromise the nation's nuclear safety.

Magwood told the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee that Jaczko had bullied and belittled at least three female staff members, one of whom told

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Magwood she was "humiliated" by what Magwood called a "raging verbal assault."

Magwood disputed a claim by Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., that the allegations against Jaczko were politically motivated. Jaczko worked for Reid before taking over as NRC chairman in 2009, and Reid expressed strong support for Jaczko throughout his tenure.

Reid is the leading congressional opponent of a now-shelved nuclear waste dump at Nevada's Yucca Mountain. Jaczko made a series of decisions in his role as chairman that aided Reid's goal — supported by the Obama administration — to prevent the Yucca Mountain site from opening.

In an interview with the Huffington Post after Jaczko's resignation, Reid lashed out at Magwood, calling him "a treacherous, miserable liar" who had deceived Reid about opposing Yucca Mountain. "He's a first-class rat ... (and) a tool of the nuclear industry," Reid said.

Magwood declined to comment Wednesday.

Before joining the NRC, Magwood served in the Clinton administration, where he headed the Energy Department's Office of Nuclear Energy. He also was a top official at the Edison Electric Institute, a trade association representing the electric industry, and worked at Westinghouse Electric Corp.

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