

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 5, 2025

The Honorable Christopher Wright
Secretary of Energy
U.S. Department of Energy
1000 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20585

Dear Secretary Wright,

We write to follow up on the serious concerns outlined in several recent letters we have sent regarding the Department of Energy's (DOE) suspension of critical energy programs, cancellation of executed awards and contracts, mass reductions in staffing, and changes to contracting policies. Collectively, these actions have created mass confusion and uncertainty that is putting critical projects and initiatives at risk, and contributing to rising energy costs for American families and businesses—not to mention stunting what should be a strong period of economic growth across the energy sector.

As highlighted in our recent letters, the actions to freeze and rescind funding for programs enacted under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), and annual appropriations are deeply troubling. These abrupt reversals—some in response to Executive Order 14154 and DOE's Secretarial Order on January 20, 2025—are causing severe uncertainty and economic risk for energy stakeholders and communities that depend on the continuity of these investments.

The recent comprehensive review and freeze of all DOE financial assistance and contracts, and the subsequent cancellations that may occur, not only undermine the spirit of competitive-based awards but also would be illegal and harmful to the public and energy consumers. Your indiscriminate cancellations of projects and deliberate blocking of approved funding will increase energy prices, make our grid less secure, and stop energy innovation. If the Department has a policy disagreement and does not want to spend money on programs Congress has funded, the lawful response is to ask Congress to rescind that funding. The decision of what programs to fund—or not—ultimately rests with Congress, not with the President, DOE, or DOGE.

Moreover, we have concerns about reports that DOE is undergoing an unprecedented reduction in staffing, with many employees facing forced retirements, administrative leave, or termination. Additionally, the Administration has extended a federal hiring freeze until July 15. The reductions and hiring freeze are reportedly affecting program offices essential to implementing existing laws and managing awarded funds. DOE's ability to effectively execute its statutory mission depends on the presence of qualified, experienced personnel. A hollowed-out workforce cannot administer the complex portfolio of federal energy programs Congress has funded.

We are also concerned by DOE's new policy that sets a 15% limit to indirect costs, otherwise known as facilities and administrative costs, for university research grants. Indirect cost support is critical for universities to cover research-related expenses, such as laboratory equipment, facilities, and operations critical for cutting-edge research. Cutting off this support, especially without warning or input from stakeholders, severely impedes universities' ability to carry out the scientific work that has been authorized by Congress and has produced critical breakthroughs we all benefit from. Further, the ramifications of this policy will likely spread far beyond the grants themselves—maintaining U.S. competitiveness depends on our research institutions' world-class facilities, which are made possible through the use of indirect costs.

Therefore, in addition to renewing our requests regarding the concerns raised in the aforementioned congressional letters—to which your Department has yet to meaningfully respond—we respectfully request responses to the following:

1. Programmatic and Legal Compliance:

- How is DOE or any other part of the administration assessing which DOE projects to cancel or continue, and under what criteria?
- Is DOE currently honoring all legal obligations for previously obligated and executed awards, including those at the National Laboratories?
- Will non-federal recipients be reimbursed for work performed and invoiced prior to or during the funding freeze?

2. Workforce Reductions and Operational Capacity:

- How many DOE employees have been furloughed, terminated, placed on administrative leave, or taken a deferred resignation package since January 20, 2025?
- What are DOE's plans for further staffing reductions, including through reductions in force, and which offices or program areas will be most impacted?
- Why did DOE collect workforce data from the National Laboratories, including the number of laboratory employees and on-site contractors, and is the Department considering reductions in force at the National Laboratories?
- How will DOE ensure continuity of services, compliance, and oversight of active awards amid these reductions and hiring freeze?
- What contingency plans exist to support grantees and contractors currently engaged in DOE-funded work, especially if their DOE points-of-contact are no longer available?

3. Transparency and Congressional Notification:

- Has DOE provided the required reports to Congress on apportionment delays or violations of the Impoundment Control Act, as outlined in federal fiscal statutes?
- Will DOE commit to proactively updating Congress and stakeholders on the status of affected programs and personnel?

4. Indirect Costs:

- How did DOE comply with required procedures, or provide appropriate justification, to deviate from its long-standing indirect cost rate policies?
- What steps is DOE taking to ensure that changes to its indirect cost policies do not cause immediate and irreparable injury to our universities' capabilities to train a next-generation energy workforce?

The Department's implementation of executive orders and internal DOE directives has introduced significant legal, fiscal, and operational concerns. The widespread programmatic disruptions and workforce reductions risk irreparably undermining DOE's credibility and mission. These actions are not only counter to DOE's legal obligations—they directly harm the American public.

We urge you to provide clarity, transparency, and accountability in these matters—as you have repeatedly promised to do—and we request a written response to the questions above by May 18, 2025.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter. We look forward to your timely reply and to working together to restore lawful, effective operations at the Department of Energy.

Sincerely,



Patty Murray
Vice Chair
Senate Committee on Appropriations



Martin Heinrich
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Energy and Natural
Resources



Rosa L. DeLauro
Ranking Member
House Committee on Appropriations



Frank Pallone, Jr.
Ranking Member
House Committee on Energy and Commerce



Zoe Lofgren
Ranking Member
House Committee on Science, Space and Technology