Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 21, 2026

The Honorable Chris Wright
Secretary of Energy
US Department of Energy
1000 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20585

Dear Secretary Wright,

We write to exercise appropriate Congressional oversight over, and request information and documents about, a troubling personnel matter that has unfolded under your leadership at the Department of Energy ("the Department"). We send this letter and exercise this oversight based on the long-held understanding and core principle that political appointees privileged to serve at the Department assume public trust, hold public office, and earn taxpayer-funded salaries. The American people expect the leaders who hold political appointment at the Department to do the work for which they are being paid at significant public expense. Unfortunately, it appears this foundational expectation and the public trust was violated by recent personnel-related decisions.

Specifically, we recently learned that Ms. Cathy Tripodi, a political appointee of the Administration who served as Director of the Office of Clean Energy Demonstrations (OCED) at the Department, remained on paid administrative leave for nearly nine months after she was removed from her at-will position. It appears that the Department allowed Ms. Tripodi to continue to earn her taxpayer-funded $190,000 per annum salary, potentially with benefits, for close to a full year after her removal from the OCED Director position. If she performed no work for the Department during the time she remained on the payroll, that would constitute a serious misuse of public funds. If she was working or detailed elsewhere while the Department paid her salary, such an arrangement raises serious questions of its own. In either case, the Department owes Congress and the American people a full and timely explanation.

This situation represents the latest in a series of developments since you were sworn in as Secretary in February 2025 that have caused ongoing concern and that collectively call into question the decisions being made at the Department. Among these developments are forced indiscriminate firings and resignations of employees;[1] the cancellation of billions of dollars for

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[1] Zack Colman and Kelsey Tamborrino, "Energy Department set to fire probationary employees," *Politico*, February 13, 2025, accessed here: https://www.politico.com/news/2025/02/13/doe-set-to-fire-at-will-employees-00204104.

projects as political retaliation against "blue" States,[2] which you sought to deny was the basis of such cancellations despite the admission in court by the U.S. Department of Justice that such retaliation was indeed the deciding rationale;[3] the pursuit of ideologically-driven market interventions that distort energy markets and raise energy costs for consumers;[4] and the illegal transfer of appropriated funds in ways that violate Congressional spending laws.[5] The consequences of these troubling developments have fallen on the American people in the form of relentless energy price increases that are compounding our Nation's current affordability crisis.

Your tenure as Secretary to date is also marked by significant turnover at the Department among political appointees, which includes the departures of Mr. Steven Winberg as Deputy Under Secretary for Infrastructure[6] and Mr. Wells Griffith as Under Secretary for Energy,[7] both of whom departed within months of assuming their respective positions. Most notably for the purposes of this letter, Ms. Tripodi – who previously served at the Department during the President's first term and who was among the current Administration's earliest political appointments at the Department[8] – was reportedly removed in October 2025 from her position as OCED Director.[9]

As the respective Ranking Members of the Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development and Related Agencies of the Committee on Appropriations and the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology in the House of Representatives, we have a duty to conduct oversight of the Department, including over personnel decisions affecting the execution of its mission and the upholding of public trust for the American people. Last October, we had no reason to believe that Ms. Tripodi's removal represented anything beyond a discretionary Presidential personnel matter. However, it now appears that the Department's handling of her departure under your leadership

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[2] Brad Plumer and Maxine Joselow, "Energy Dept. Cancels $7.5 Billion for Hundreds of Projects, Mostly in Blue States," *New York Times*, October 2, 2025, accessed here: https://www.nytimes.com/2025/10/02/climate/doe-clean-energy-programs-shutdown.html?eafs_enabled=false.

[3] Evan Halper, "DOE head says agency didn't punish blue states. His lawyers admit it did," *Washington Post*, June 12, 2026, accessed here: https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2026/06/12/energy-dept-head-says-agency-didnt-punish-blue-states-his-lawyers-admit-it-did/.

[4] Ethan Howland, "DOE emergency orders are incurring additional costs. What are the benefits?" *Utility Dive*, June 25, 2026, accessed here: https://www.utilitydive.com/news/doe-emergency-power-plants-reliability-benefits-costs/822934/.

[5] Christa Marshall, "DOE spent money not appropriated by Congress – audit," *E&E News*, June 4, 2026, accessed here: https://www.eenews.net/articles/doe-spent-money-not-appropriated-by-congress-audit/.

[6] Hannah Northey, "Energy secretary's adviser exits DOE," *E&E News*, May 2, 2025, accessed here: https://www.eenews.net/articles/energy-secretarys-adviser-exits-doe/.

[7] Nico Portuondo and Kevin Bogardus, "Senators confirm DOE nominee; advance EPA, nuclear picks," *E&E News*, July 9, 2025, accessed here: https://www.eenews.net/articles/senators-confirm-doe-nominee-advance-epa-nuclear-picks/.

[8] Brian Dabbs, "Former Trump official returns to DOE," *E&E News*, January 23, 2025, accessed here: https://www.eenews.net/articles/former-trump-official-returns-to-doe/.

[9] Ben Lefebvre and Zack Colman, "'It just seems so messy': How Chris Wright went wrong with the White House," *Politico*, October 17, 2025, accessed here: https://www.politico.com/news/2025/10/17/chris-wright-white-house-00612920.

and other personnel matters may have implicated and may represent the misuse of taxpayer dollars.

Late last month, we learned that Ms. Tripodi remained on paid administrative leave at the Department long after her reported removal from the OCED Director position. Ms. Tripodi had been relieved of her duties nearly nine months earlier in October 2025, and by all accounts her work at the Department had ended at that time. As a political appointee, she lacked civil service protections. There was no legal or administrative barrier to terminating her employment with the Department on the day she was removed. Even so, she apparently remained on the Department's payroll for nearly nine months, presumably without performing any work. Her government annual salary of $190,000, according to the most recent publicly available information from the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM),[10] was significant by any standard, and certainly by the standards of most American families. Our understanding upon learning about this situation was that Ms. Tripodi's paid administrative leave was scheduled to end on or around the end of the month of June 2026. However, it is unclear whether any additional financial benefits or severance pay accompanied the end of her leave.

Since January 2025, the Administration has moved quickly to remove a significant number of highly respected, expert career employees. The Department's leadership has eagerly participated and embraced these career employee removals.[11] Yet the same urgency through which these Federal workforce reductions have been carried out under the current Administration does not appear to have been applied in the case of Ms. Tripodi. If Ms. Tripodi did not perform any work for the Department during the period she remained on the payroll, that is a troubling double standard – particularly for an Administration that repeatedly invokes "waste, fraud, and abuse" as justification for its broad, unprecedented reductions in force, terminations of career civil servants, and curtailment of programs that serve the public interest. If, on the other hand, Ms. Tripodi was employed or detailed outside the Department – for example, at a National Laboratory or a Department contractor – while continuing to draw her Department of Energy salary, such arrangement raises serious conflict-of-interest and dual-compensation concerns, and it is difficult to understand why the Department would pay a former appointee to work outside its domain. We do not know which of these scenarios may apply in this case, and the Department should tell us.

Keeping a political appointee who has been relieved of her duties on the payroll for nearly nine months is difficult to justify as being in the public interest, whether she performed no work during that time or was paid by the Department while working elsewhere. As skyrocketing energy costs increasingly burden American families, the Department should be able to explain what public purpose this arrangement served. We expect you to account for how it occurred and to identify who was responsible.

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[10] GovInfo, "United States Government Policy and Supporting Positions (Plum Book)," Office of Personnel Management, July 10, 2025, accessed here: https://www.govinfo.gov/app/details/GPO-PLUMBOOK-2025-07-10/.
[11] Robin Bravender, "Tracker shows Interior, DOE staff exodus," *E&E News*, July 31, 2025, accessed here: https://www.eenews.net/articles/tracker-shows-interior-doe-staff-exodus/.

We intend to obtain the answers that we seek through this letter. Please respond to the following questions and document production requests no later than two weeks from today, 5:00 PM on Wednesday, August 5, 2026:

1. How long was Ms. Tripodi on paid administrative leave at the Department? Please disclose the initial date that she was placed on paid administrative leave and the final date of her paid administrative leave.

2. How much salary did Ms. Tripodi earn during her time on paid administrative leave? To what government benefits was Ms. Tripodi entitled during her time on administrative leave, what benefits did she receive, and what was the total value of those benefits?

3. Did Ms. Tripodi receive any severance pay, or any other financial benefit, at the end of her paid administrative leave?

4. Which Department official(s) authorized Ms. Tripodi's placement on paid administrative leave?

5. Why did the Department place Ms. Tripodi on paid administrative leave after she was removed from her position as OCED Director? What was the legal justification for her placement on paid administrative leave and what specific statutory and regulatory basis served to authorize such leave?

6. Have any other political appointees at the Department been placed on paid administrative leave since January 20, 2025? Please identify each political appointee who has been placed on paid administrative leave since that date, the initial date of their administrative leave and the final date of their administrative leave, and the specific reason(s) and legal basis for placing them on administrative leave.

7. During the period she remained on the Department's payroll following her removal as OCED Director, was Ms. Tripodi detailed or otherwise assigned at any time to any other entity, including but not limited to a Department of Energy National Laboratory, a contractor, another Federal agency, or any other organization? If so, please identify each such entity, the date(s) of the detail or assignment, the nature of the work performed, which DOE official(s) authorized it, and the source(s) of funding for her salary during that time.

8. During the period she remained on the Department's payroll following her removal, did Ms. Tripodi hold any other employment or receive any other compensation from any source? If so, please identify each source of employment or compensation and the dates involved.

9. Did the Department's ethics official(s), or ethics official(s) placed anywhere else in the Federal Government, review any detail, assignment, outside employment, or other activity of Ms. Tripodi during this period in question for compliance with applicable conflict-of-interest and ethics requirements? If so, please describe each such review and its outcome. If not, please explain why no such review was conducted.

In addition, please provide the following information to our Committees:

1. All documents and communications (including, but not limited to, emails, text messages, instant messages, Signal messages, comments, notes, analyses, legal and other memoranda, letters, telephone logs, meeting minutes, calendar entries, PowerPoint slides, and presentation materials) within the Department regarding the decision to place Ms. Tripodi on paid administrative leave.

2. All documents and communications (including, but not limited to, emails, text messages, instant messages, Signal messages, comments, notes, analyses, legal and other memoranda, letters, telephone logs, meeting minutes, calendar entries, PowerPoint slides, and presentation materials) within the Department regarding the end of Ms. Tripodi's paid administrative leave.

3. All documents and communications (including, but not limited to, emails, text messages, instant messages, Signal messages, comments, notes, analyses, legal and other memoranda, letters, telephone logs, meeting minutes, calendar entries, PowerPoint slides, and presentation materials) between the Department and the White House Liaison and Deputy White House Liaison, assigned to the Office of the Secretary inside the Department, regarding Ms. Tripodi's paid administrative leave.

4. All emails sent from Ms. Tripodi's official government email account at the Department, and all emails received by Ms. Tripodi's official government email account at the Department, between October 1, 2025, and the final date of her paid administrative leave.

5. All text messages, instant messages, and Signal messages sent from Ms. Tripodi's official government-issued equipment, and all text messages, instant messages, and Signal messages received by Ms. Tripodi's official government-issued equipment, between October 1, 2025, and the final date of her paid administrative leave.

6. A copy of the written administrative leave policies, and any associated guidance or memoranda, adopted for the Department that applied during the period Ms. Tripodi was placed on paid administrative leave, and the current version of such policies and related documentation as of the date of this letter, if different.

If you have any questions regarding this letter, please contact Scott McKee with the Minority Staff of the House Committee on Appropriations at (202) 225-3481 or Adam Rosenberg with the

Minority Staff of the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology at (202) 225-6375. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

Marcy Kaptur
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development
and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations

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