Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

September 10, 2025

The Honorable Donld J. Trump
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Trump,

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) is planning to give at least 20 metric tons of weapons-usable plutonium—enough for approximately 2,000 nuclear bombs—to private industry for commercial energy use. Such a step goes against long-standing, bipartisan U.S. nuclear security policy. It raises serious weapons proliferation concerns, makes little economic sense, and may adversely affect the nation's defense posture. Given these concerns, we urge you to cancel these misguided plans.

According to a recent press report, your administration plans to make roughly 20 metric tons of Cold War-era plutonium—sourced from military stocks and previously slated for disposal under a non-proliferation pact with Russia—available to U.S. power companies as potential reactor fuel.[1] An executive order that you signed in May 2025 halted the existing "dilute and dispose" program, replacing it with a scheme that would supply the plutonium at little to no cost, though industry would shoulder the expenses and logistical responsibilities of transporting, processing, and converting it into usable fuel.[2]

The transfer of weapons-usable plutonium to private industry would increase the risk of nuclear weapons proliferation, including to rogue states or terrorists.[3] For five decades, the United States has avoided the commercial use of plutonium and opposed the spread of technology to separate ("reprocess") plutonium from used reactor fuel. We did so to prevent nations with nuclear power plants from being able to extract plutonium from that fuel, which they—or terrorists into whose hands it could fall—could use to make nuclear weapons. Indeed, in the mid-1970s, both Presidents Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter established nonproliferation policies to avoid the use of plutonium fuel domestically and to strongly discourage it abroad.[4] Today, among the more than 30 countries with nuclear energy, many of which previously explored using plutonium fuel, only one —France—still uses it widely.

Your plan—which would provide U.S. companies with plutonium from U.S. military stocks and subsidize them both to reprocess plutonium domestically and export reprocessing technology[5]—would reverse

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[1] Timothy Gardner, *Exclusive: Trump plans to make Cold War-era plutonium available for nuclear power,* Reuters (Aug. 22, 2025), https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/trump-plans-make-cold-war-era-plutonium-available-nuclear-power-2025-08-22.

[2] Executive Order No. 14,302, 90 Fed. Reg. 22595 (May 23, 2025), https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/05/29/2025-09801/reinvigorating-the-nuclear-industrial-base.

[3] *See* Letter to the Chairs and Ranking Members of the Senate and House Armed Services, Foreign Relations, Energy, Commerce, Science, Homeland Security, and Appropriations Committees, from Alan J. Kuperman, Associate Professor, LBJ School of Public Affairs, University of Texas at Austin, Coordinator, Nuclear Proliferation Prevention Project et al., (July 17, 2025), https://sites.utexas.edu/nppp/files/2025/07/Nuclear-EOs-Proliferation-2025-7-17.pdf.

[4] *See* Anthony Andrews, *Nuclear Fuel Reprocessing: U.S. Policy Development*, CRS Report for Congress (Mar. 27, 2008), https://sgp.fas.org/crs/nuke/RS22542.pdf.

[5] Alan J. Kuperman, *U.S. Nuclear Energy Plans Could Proliferate Weapons*, Scientific American (July 30, 2025), https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/u-s-nuclear-energy-policy-could-accelerate-weapons-proliferation/.

our successful nonproliferation policy. The United States cannot effectively discourage other countries from using plutonium for civil purposes if we use it ourselves.

Further, using plutonium in nuclear energy is significantly more expensive than disposing of it as waste. During your first administration, the Department of Energy canceled its plans to process surplus plutonium into reactor fuel due to the estimated cost relative to disposal of the surplus plutonium as waste—$49 billion for processing, as opposed to $20 billion for disposal.[6] Due to this major difference in cost ($37 billion in today's dollars due to inflation), DOE opted to dispose of the plutonium instead. To be clear, commercial nuclear energy does not require separated plutonium, and today there is no global demand for plutonium to make civilian nuclear reactor fuel. Nuclear power reactors instead rely on uranium fuel, which is safer and cheaper to process.

Finally, we are concerned that your plan would give away plutonium that could otherwise help to maintain the nuclear arsenal. We have learned that DOE is considering taking a significant amount of plutonium (about 5 metric tons) from reserve warhead parts known as "pits"—the fissile core of a nuclear weapon that triggers its explosion. The United States' ability to produce new pits at Los Alamos National Lab is limited. In some cases, existing pits can be used instead of new ones and thereby reduce the need for new, costly plutonium pit production. We should not disassemble existing pits that might reduce the need to produce new ones in the future.

Given the gravity of these concerns, we request your responses to the following questions in writing by September 30, 2025:

1. How can the U.S. discourage countries from using weapons-usable plutonium in civilian fuel if we do so ourselves?

2. Given the proliferation risks of plutonium, why should the U.S. government facilitate the development and export of proliferation-prone reprocessing technologies?

3. Why should the U.S. government promote the historically failed reuse of reactor fuel into fresh plutonium fuel?

4. Why should the U.S. government process surplus weapons plutonium into civilian fuel, if that would increase costs by $37 billion and increase risks of nuclear proliferation and terrorism?

5. If the U.S. government proceeds to process surplus weapons plutonium into civilian fuel, which vital national security programs will be cut to pay for the additional $37 billion expense?

6. In what forms will the surplus plutonium be transferred? Will the administration require any processing of the plutonium, and if so, what is the estimated cost of this processing?

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[6] U.S. Government Accountability Office, *DOE and NNSA Should Improve Their Lessons-Learned Process for Capital Asset Projects* (Dec. 2018), https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-19-25.pdf; U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Surplus Plutonium Disposition: NNSA's Long-Term Plutonium Oxide Production Plans Are Uncertain. Report to the Committee on Armed Services, U.S. Senate* (Oct. 2019), https://www.gao.gov/assets/710/705783.pdf.

7. What safety and security measures are planned for the transport of weapons-grade plutonium to private actors? What steps will be taken to ensure that companies receiving plutonium are taking adequate measures to safely store and utilize plutonium?

8. How much, if any, of the plutonium to be given to private industry will come from intact pits? Are any of those pits of types that could be reused in the future? Will the disassembly of these pits slow down the pit production process at Los Alamos? Is DOE considering the transfer of intact pits to private industry?

9. How would the transfer of weapons plutonium to private industry affect the possible need to produce new plutonium for nuclear weapons in the future?

We appreciate your prompt attention to our concerns.

Sincerely,

Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

Donald S. Beyer Jr.
Member of Congress

John Garamendi
Member of Congress