

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

February 20, 2025

The Honorable Chris Wright  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Energy  
1000 Independence Ave., SW  
Washington, DC 20024

Dear Secretary Wright,

On Thursday, February 13, 2025, the so-called Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) fired up to 350 staff members at the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA). The NNSA is entrusted with safeguarding our nation's nuclear weapons, materials, and secrets. These terminations jeopardize the security of the U.S. nuclear stockpile, weaken our ability to detect and prevent threats to those weapons, and undermine our nonproliferation commitments. Realizing the gravity of the mistake it had made, the Trump administration scrambled to rehire the fired employees. Serious damage has been done. We urge you to immediately reassess these decisions, restore necessary expertise to the NNSA, and ensure that NNSA staffing decisions prioritize safety and security.

The NNSA plays an essential role in maintaining the safety, security, and effectiveness of the U.S. nuclear arsenal and preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. According to press reports, these firings occurred because “the officials did not seem to know this agency oversees America’s nuclear weapons.”<sup>1</sup> The reckless decision to eliminate 350 positions, without a clear national security justification, raises serious concerns about the Department of Energy’s (DOE) commitment to this core mission. DOE has struggled to rehire some of these employees “because they didn’t have their new contact information.”<sup>2</sup> This series of events calls into further question DOGE’s competence to carry out its self-assigned task.

To be clear, we fully support efforts to reduce our reliance on nuclear weapons, responsibly reduce the nuclear stockpile, and curb unnecessary spending on nuclear defense programs that do not enhance our security. But recklessly firing personnel without a strategic plan, particularly those with expertise in nonproliferation, security, and arms control oversight, is extraordinarily irresponsible and dangerous to U.S. national security.

Although you and DOGE may find it administratively convenient to fire probationary employees, these particular employees were not inexperienced new hires to the federal government. They were largely seasoned experts who had experience serving in the NNSA as contractors. Their abrupt termination creates the possibility that:

- key nonproliferation and arms control functions may now be left under-staffed and under-resourced;
- monitoring for and addressing threats to the U.S. nuclear arsenal will become more difficult;
- and
- critical oversight of the nuclear stockpile will be weakened.

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<sup>1</sup> Rene Marsh and Ella Nilsen, *Trump officials fired nuclear staff not realizing they oversee the country’s weapons stockpile, sources say*, CNN (Feb. 14, 2025), <https://www.cnn.com/2025/02/14/climate/nuclear-nnsa-firings-trump/index.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Alexander and Alexandra Marquez, *Trump administration wants to un-fire nuclear safety workers but can’t figure out how to reach them*, NBC News (Feb. 15, 2025), <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/national-security/trump-administration-wants-un-fire-nuclear-safety-workers-cant-figure-rcna192345>.

One of us previously wrote to you on February 12, 2025, to express the concern that unvetted, inexperienced, and uncleared DOGE personnel have been granted access to DOE IT systems over the objections of members of its general counsel and chief information offices. The most recent turn of events at the NNSA only serves to amplify these worries.

Congress has given NNSA additional hiring and incentive authorities to address systemic concerns about recruiting and retaining the workforce necessary to keep Americans safe.<sup>3</sup> Haphazardly firing staff is not a responsible approach to streamlining governance over the U.S. nuclear arsenal. Rather, it is a dangerous lapse in security and judgment that puts the United States in grave danger. Even if fired NNSA staffers are rehired, it is not clear how many will choose to return or for how long. DOE has now proven itself to be an unreliable employer.

Given the serious implications of the firing of NNSA employees, we request written responses to the following questions by Friday, February 21, 2025:

1. What was the rationale for the reduction in staff at the NNSA? Who determined that NNSA had too many employees and why? What is the Administration's broader strategy for responsibly ensuring adequate staffing at the NNSA that guarantees strong and effective oversight of the nuclear arsenal?
2. How many NNSA staff have been identified as probationary and for which positions?
3. How is DOE applying national security exemptions for OPM's so-called buyout?
4. If NNSA employees are not exempt, will the decision on whether to accept employees' resignations include an assessment of how the loss of the employee in that role would impact DOE capabilities? If so, how will you make that assessment? Please detail all the factors you would consider.
5. What, if any, security assessments were conducted before terminating these 350 NNSA employees?
6. What functions did each of these employees serve? Before the rehiring, how did DOE and NNSA plan to ensure those roles were properly staffed going forward?
7. Which employees have been rehired and how many have accepted the offer to come back?
8. What steps are DOE and NNSA taking to prevent unauthorized access to classified systems by DOGE members?

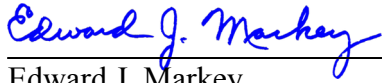
There is a right way to reduce the size and scope of our nuclear arsenal — one that enhances global security, properly safeguards our weapons, and reduces nuclear risks. These terminations do none of that.

We appreciate your attention to this urgent matter of U.S. nuclear security and look forward to promptly receiving responses to our questions.

Sincerely,

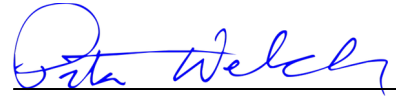
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<sup>3</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office, *NATIONAL NUCLEAR SECURITY ADMINISTRATION: Actions to Recruit and Retain Federal Staff Could Be Improved*, (P.24) Report to the Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives (May 2024).



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Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator



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Peter Welch  
United States Senator



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Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator



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Jacky Rosen  
United States Senator



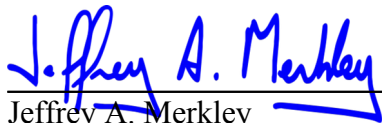
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Cory A. Booker  
United States Senator



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John Garamendi  
Member of Congress



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Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator