

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 10, 2025

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

Dear Secretary Wright:

The National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA), an integral part of the Department of Energy (DOE), is entrusted with protecting the nation's nuclear arsenal and preventing the spread of these deadly weapons to other nations or groups. The United States and the world need to know that our nuclear weapons are robustly safeguarded at all times. It is, therefore, dangerously unacceptable that the Trump administration claims it will have to temporarily suspend certain nuclear security programs because of the ongoing government shutdown. There is no justification for relaxing security and oversight when it comes to our nuclear stockpile. Despite the shutdown, DOE must ensure that our nation's nuclear arsenal is protected with the highest security standards.

Established in 2000 as part of DOE, the NNSA plays a critical role in ensuring the nation's nuclear security. The NNSA oversees the maintenance and security of the U.S. nuclear arsenal, including securing nuclear materials and advancing nuclear nonproliferation and arms control efforts globally. The NNSA's work is vital not only in safeguarding the nuclear arsenal but also in upholding U.S. leadership in global efforts to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons. The NNSA's ability to achieve its mission remains integral to U.S. defense policy.

I was therefore shocked to hear you say that the federal government shutdown would soon cause an NNSA funding crisis that could put U.S. national security in danger. Recently, you were quoted as saying, in reference to NNSA, that "[e]ight more days of funding, and then we have to go into some emergency shutdown procedures, putting our country at risk."¹ A few days later, NNSA administrator Brandon Williams reportedly said that the shutdown is forcing his agency to adopt a "minimum safe operations posture."²

This situation is not acceptable and should be completely avoidable. The Trump administration has control over how the NNSA plans its operations during a government shutdown. The NNSA's operations were largely unaffected during the 35-day government shutdown that occurred during President Trump's first term, and DOE has previously said it did not expect any disruption to its operations from this shutdown.³ So, what changed?

¹ Kelsey Tamborrino, *Money to oversee nuclear weapons safety will start running low after 8 days, Energy secretary says*, Politico (Oct. 3, 2025), <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/10/03/nuclear-energy-nnsa-00592883>.

² Andres Picon, *Nuclear security chief warns Johnson of shutdown impacts*, Politico (Oct. 8 2025), <https://subscriber.politicopro.com/article/eenews/2025/10/08/nuclear-security-chief-warns-johnson-of-shutdown-impacts-00596477>.

³ U.S. Department of Energy, *Department of Energy Implementation Activities Plan in the Case of a Lapse of Appropriations* (Sept. 30, 2025), <https://www.energy.gov/articles/department-energy-implementation-activities-plan-case-lapse-appropriations>.

It appears that you are using the NNSA as a political prop in the partisan shutdown debate. You reportedly said that “Chuck Schumer is worried about his left flank and is willing to put at risk Americans’ jobs in the country to protect his own political future. What about Americans? What about our nuclear security?”⁴ By invoking “our nuclear security” to score political points, you are the one turning a vital national security mission into a shutdown talking point. It is your decision to limit funding for the NNSA—not Congress’s—that puts our country’s nuclear security at risk.

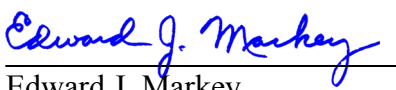
This would not be the first time DOE prioritized partisan politics over NNSA’s nuclear security mission. Earlier this year you looked on as Elon Musk’s DOGE fired too many people from NNSA and then had to scramble to hire some of them back.⁵ DOGE appointees were reportedly unaware of the NNSA’s role in nuclear security.⁶

Given the gravity of this situation, we request a written response to the following questions by October 15, 2025:

1. As DOE plans to put NNSA into a “minimum safe operations posture,” which NNSA activities will continue, and which will not?
2. If discontinued, which specific NNSA activities led you to claim that the United States would be “at risk”?
3. If the Administration’s own plan for NNSA threatens to put our country at risk, why would you not choose a different plan?

The NNSA’s nuclear security mission is too important to allow it to get caught up in a partisan political fight. I am deeply concerned by this disregard of DOE security protocols and the potential impacts on our nuclear security. I appreciate your attention to this urgent matter and look forward to promptly receiving responses to our questions.

Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

⁴ Kelsey Tamborrino, *Money to oversee nuclear weapons safety will start running low after 8 days*, *Energy secretary says*, Politico (Oct. 3, 2025), <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/10/03/nuclear-energy-nnsa-00592883>.

⁵ Liz Crampton et al., *Stunned federal workers brace for the real-world repercussions of Trump’s purges*, Politico (Feb. 15, 2025), <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/02/15/trump-purges-real-world-consequences-disasters-00204475>.

⁶ 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>.