

# United States Senate

October 3, 2025

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

Dear Secretary Wright:

This week, you announced that the Department of Energy is sending \$625 million of taxpayer money to prop up uneconomical big coal companies. This multimillion-dollar giveaway flagrantly defies Congress' power of the purse, does not provide relief for skyrocketing electricity bills that Americans are facing under the Trump administration, and further hurts the health and wellbeing of Americans by forcing more pollution on our communities. On behalf of households struggling to pay their energy bills, parents worried about their children's health, and members of Congress deeply troubled by your ongoing abuse of the appropriations process, I write to demand answers.

Throwing taxpayer money at the coal industry makes no economic sense, especially at a time when the Trump administration's policies are causing household electricity bills to rise dramatically. Since January 2025, electricity prices have increased 10 percent and are rising twice as fast as the overall rate of inflation, which, despite President Trump's false claims, also remains high.<sup>1</sup> One way to address these high electricity prices is to put more affordable energy on the grid, by adding wind- and solar-generated power, for example. Instead, the Trump administration is actively blocking clean energy projects and wasting taxpayer money on uneconomical, unhealthy, and outdated coal technology.

Coal is not affordable and has been on the decline for years, making it a terrible investment for Americans. Ninety-five percent of coal plants are more expensive to run now than

---

<sup>1</sup> Mary Whitfill Roeloffs, *Electric Bills Are Up 10% So Far This Year—Why They Could Keep Getting Costlier*, Forbes (Aug. 19, 2025), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/maryroeloffs/2025/08/19/electric-bills-are-up-10-so-far-this-year-why-they-could-keep-getting-costlier/>; Scott Horsley, *Electricity Prices Are Climbing More than Twice as Fast as Inflation*, NPR (Aug. 16, 2025), <https://www.npr.org/2025/08/16/nx-s1-5502671/electricity-bill-high-inflation-ai>.

they were four years ago.<sup>2</sup> By comparison, on average, it is cheaper to build new wind and solar facilities than run *existing* coal plants in the United States, much less build and operate *new* coal plants.<sup>3</sup> And wind and solar are not just affordable. If fully unleashed, they can readily meet rising demand. Indeed, in 2024, wind and solar produced more electricity for the U.S. grid than coal.<sup>4</sup> That trend is expected to continue, as solar, wind, and battery storage are projected to comprise 92 percent of all utility-scale generating capacity added to the grid in 2025, even as the Trump administration takes unprecedented steps to sabotage new renewable electricity generation.<sup>5</sup> By comparison, no new coal plants are planned, and over the next few years dozens are slated to retire due to age and high operating costs.

Despite all the benefits of solar, wind, and battery storage, you announced a \$625 million investment to “modernize” and prop up coal plants.<sup>6</sup> And you plan to use emergency orders to keep the *majority* of the nation’s coal-fired power plants online, despite their planned retirements due to the high costs they pose to ratepayers.<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, the Trump administration's actions to bail out Big Coal are projected to cost American ratepayers up to \$6 billion on their electricity bills annually.<sup>8</sup> Americans are already feeling this pain every month—all to prop up a floundering industry. You invoked emergency powers to keep a coal plant in Michigan online, even though its owners and regulators had already decided to retire it. Keeping just this one coal plant online will cost \$1 million per day, paid for by households across the region it serves.<sup>9</sup> By 2029, roughly 27,000 megawatts worth of

---

<sup>2</sup> Michelle Solomon, *Coal Power 28 Percent More Expensive in 2024 than in 2021*, Energy Innovation (June 5, 2025), <https://energyinnovation.org/report/the-coal-cost-crossover-https://energyinnovation.org/report/coal-power-28-percent-more-expensive-in-2024-than-in-2021/>.

<sup>3</sup> Eric Gimon, Michelle Solomon, and Mike O’Boyle, *The Coal Cost Crossover 3.0*, Energy Innovation (Jan. 30, 2023), <https://energyinnovation.org/report/the-coal-cost-crossover-3-0/>.

<sup>4</sup> Perry Cleveland-Peck, *Wind and Solar Overtake Coal Power for the First Time in U.S., Says Think Tank*, Wall St. J. (Mar. 12, 2025), <https://www.wsj.com/articles/wind-and-solar-overtake-coal-power-for-the-first-time-in-the-u-s-a52e9d8f>.

<sup>5</sup> *U.S. Developers Report Half of New Electric Generating Capacity Will Come from Solar*, U.S. Energy Information Agency (Aug. 20, 2025), <https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=65964>.

<sup>6</sup> Press Release, U.S. Department of Energy, *Energy Department Announces \$625 Million Investment to Reinvigorate and Expand America’s Coal Industry* (Sept. 29, 2025), <https://www.energy.gov/articles/energy-department-announces-625-million-investment-reinvigorate-and-expand-americas-coal>.

<sup>7</sup> Laila Kearney and Timothy Gardner, *Most Coal-Fired Power Plants Will Delay Retirement to Feed AI Boom, Energy Secretary Says*, Reuters (Sept. 25, 2025), <https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/climate-energy/us-urges-utilities-keep-coal-fired-plants-running-ai-demand-booms-energy-2025-09-25/>.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Goggin, *The Cost of Federal Mandates to Retain Fossil-Burning Power Plants*, Grid Strategies (Aug. 2025), [https://earthjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/grid-strategies\\_cost-of-federal-mandates-to-retain-fossil-burning-power-plants.pdf](https://earthjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/grid-strategies_cost-of-federal-mandates-to-retain-fossil-burning-power-plants.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> Oliver Milman, *A Coal-Fired Plant in Michigan Was to Close. But Trump Forced It to Keep Running at \$1m a Day*, The Guardian (Aug. 21, 2025), <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2025/aug/21/jh-campbell-coal-power-plant-michigan-trump-administration>.

U.S. coal plants are slated to retire. Your quest to force these failing facilities to stay online will force American ratepayers to shoulder unfathomable costs.<sup>10</sup>

The health harms from coal power compound all these economic burdens. Wastewater from coal power plants dumped toxic pollution into the public water systems of more than 30 million Americans last year, according to the Environmental Protection Agency.<sup>11</sup> Toxic coal ash put arsenic, chromium, and lead into water and soil at 324 sites across the United States, including at every single active coal plant in the country.<sup>12</sup> And air pollution from coal-fired power plants is deadly—it's more than two times more likely to kill than even other sources of fine particulate matter—and was linked to 460,000 excess deaths between 1999 and 2020.<sup>13</sup>

The American people cannot afford to keep subsidizing coal power plants through federal giveaways, on their electric bills every month, and in medical bills and hospitalizations. To help me better understand why the Trump administration is taking what appear to be inexplicable and unjustified steps to support the coal industry at the expense of the American public, please respond to the following questions in writing by October 17, 2025:

1. What annual or supplemental appropriations are you using to provide \$625 million of taxpayer money to prop up the coal industry?
2. What specific statutory authority—including the relevant public law and section—was cited by the Department of Energy's General Counsel in approving this reprogramming, transfer, or repurposing of funds? Furthermore, was the General Counsel's analysis based on the Department's general annual transfer authority, or other law?
3. Why is the Department of Energy forcing ratepayers to subsidize uneconomical coal plants that were set to retire?
4. Has the Department of Energy analyzed the projected increase in costs to ratepayers that will result from its stated campaign to keep uneconomic coal plants operational? If so, please provide this analysis. If not, why not?

---

<sup>10</sup> *Electric Power Monthly: Table 6.6. Planned U.S. Electric Generating Unit Retirements*, U.S. Energy Information Agency, [https://www.eia.gov/electricity/monthly/epm\\_table\\_grapher.php?t=table\\_6\\_06](https://www.eia.gov/electricity/monthly/epm_table_grapher.php?t=table_6_06) (last accessed Sept. 30, 2025).

<sup>11</sup> Supplemental Effluent Limitations Guidelines and Standards for the Steam Electric Power Generating Point Source Category, 89 Fed. Reg. 40,198 (May 9, 2024) (to be codified at 40 C.F.R. pt. 423) <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2024/05/09/2024-09185/supplemental-effluent-limitations-guidelines-and-standards-for-the-steam-electric-power-generating>.

<sup>12</sup> *Where are Coal Ash Dump Sites?*, Earthjustice (Apr. 17, 2025), <https://earthjustice.org/feature/coal-ash-map-sites-legacy-inactive-regulated>.

<sup>13</sup> Maya Brownstein, 'It's Much More Harmful than We Thought, and Its Mortality Burden has been Seriously Underestimated', *The Harvard Gazette* (Nov. 23, 2023), <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2023/11/particulate-pollution-from-coal-may-be-twice-as-deadly-as-that-from-other-sources/>; Brian Doctrow, *Deaths Associated with Pollution from Coal Power Plants*, National Institutes of Health (Dec. 12, 2023), <https://www.nih.gov/news-events/nih-research-matters/deaths-associated-pollution-coal-power-plants>.

5. Has the Department of Energy worked with the Environmental Protection Agency or the Department of Health and Human Services to assess the health impacts from increased air pollution and exposure to toxic coal ash as a result of this coal bailout? If so, please provide this analysis. If not, why not?

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Edward J. Markey". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a horizontal line drawn underneath it.

Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator