

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

February 26, 2025

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

Dear Secretary Wright:

We are writing to demand an end to the Trump Administration's illegal firings of public servants, including those at the Department of Energy (DOE). The affected individuals at the DOE are responsible for managing our nuclear weapons arsenal, ensuring affordable and reliable energy for all Americans, managing factory investments that have created tens of thousands of jobs, and helping the United States compete with China in the global market for next-generation energy technology. These are essential public services brushed aside in the chaotic disruption of vital government functions that has become a central feature of this Administration.

On February 14th, the Administration reportedly terminated at least 1,800 employees at the DOE.¹ These firings are illegal. Congress enacted merit system principles to protect all federal employees from arbitrary action and coercion for partisan political purposes. Congress also made clear that federal employees must be treated with due regard for their privacy and constitutional rights.² The Administration's actions fall far short of these standards and instead are the precise types of actions that Congress has consistently legislated against, in accordance with Congress's Article I powers to regulate executive agencies.

A federal employee still in their probationary period, moreover, may only be terminated if their work performance or conduct does not demonstrate their fitness or qualifications for continued employment,³ and not for made-up arbitrary reasons or partisan political reasons. Additionally, federal law requires that, if a probationary employee is terminated, they must receive information in their termination notice that "shall as a minimum, consist of the agency's conclusions as to the inadequacies of his performance or conduct".⁴ These requirements were implemented to prevent partisan politics from influencing the decision to replace a public servant—partisan politics of the kind that appear to motivate the current administration.

DOE probationary employees covered by unions have further rights that were ignored in the illegal firings. For example, the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) that covers employees at the DOE Headquarters requires supervisors to meet with probationary employees every six months and to share whether an employee needs to improve their performance for continued employment.⁵ Yet most of the employees covered by the CBA received termination letters from the political appointees of their office that simply stated their continued employment is "not in the public interest." Immediate supervisors who provided probationary employees with superior performance reviews were given no say or recourse in the illegal firing decisions.⁶

¹ https://www.appropriations.senate.gov/news/minority/fact-sheet-trump-and-elons-layoffs-jeopardize-essential-services-americans-rely-on-threaten-critical-agency-objectives-keeping-americans-safe_healthy

² 5 U.S.C. § 2301(b)

³ 5 CFR 315.804

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ See Article 42.02 of the DOE National Headquarters Collective Bargaining Agreement, available at <https://www.energy.gov/careers/articles/hq-nteu>

⁶ "Federal workers detail chaotic, error-filled firings," Washington Post, February 18, 2025

If not reversed, these firings could constitute an impoundment in that the president would be attempting to do unilaterally by fiat what he cannot pass through Congress – an attempt to seize a power clearly assigned to Congress in the U.S. Constitution.⁷ Congress, with bipartisan support, has consistently allocated funding to the DOE to ensure America’s security and prosperity by addressing its energy, environmental, and nuclear challenges through transformative science and technology solutions. By illegally ignoring the will of Congress, these mass firings are harming critical bipartisan objectives and causing chaos within the offices that address these critical national challenges. Moreover, future layoffs would severely limit the department's ability to meet its core missions of ensuring nuclear security, providing affordable energy, and promoting economic development.

One of Congress’s key objectives with regard to the DOE is to manage our nation's nuclear weapons arsenal, which has been fundamental to our national security since the end of World War II. Yet 325 of the recently dismissed probationary employees work for the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA),⁸ which is responsible for safeguarding our nation’s nuclear arsenal while also working to reduce the global threat associated with nuclear weapons.⁹ The scientists and other experts in the NNSA hold some of the most critical positions in the field of nuclear weaponry. Dismissing these essential employees not only undermines our national security but also jeopardizes the fragile pipeline of future nuclear experts.

We acknowledge that you are attempting to rehire these NNSA employees, but the violations remain, and significant damage has already been done. Additionally, your administration reportedly cannot contact these nuclear employees to try to rehire them.¹⁰ This is concerning and demonstrates a shocking level of incompetence.

Your mass firings are also disrupting programs that make energy more affordable for all Americans and deploy investments for clean energy manufacturing that supports tens of thousands of jobs. Dozens of employees were fired who deployed funding through the Home Energy Rebates and Weatherization Assistance Program, which reduce energy bills by hundreds of dollars each year for low-income households.¹¹ Roughly 60 employees were also fired from the Loans Program Office,¹² which has provided funding to support 32 manufacturing facilities that will employ nearly 47,000 Americans.¹³ Ironically, a \$465 million loan from the DOE Loan Programs Office went to Elon Musk to help him build his first mass-market factory.¹⁴ Yet Musk is now trying to gut the program, which appears to us an attempt to quash potential competition from other electric vehicle manufacturers.

During your confirmation hearing before the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee on January 15, you stated, “My mission would be to inspire people in the department, in the labs, and across the network to focus on what’s most important for Americans, which is growing the supply of affordable, reliable, and secure American energy.”¹⁵ These politically motivated mass firings run contrary to that goal.

⁷ <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/COMPS-10356/pdf/COMPS-10356.pdf#page=60>

⁸ <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/sweeping-us-energy-department-layoffs-hit-nuclear-security-loans-office-sources-2025-02-14/>

⁹ <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-energy-department-says-less-than-50-purged-nuclear-security-office-2025-02-16/>

¹⁰ <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/national-security/trump-administration-wants-un-fire-nuclear-safety-workers-cant-figure-rcna192345>

¹¹ As reported on February 19, 2025 by representatives of the DOE Union, the National Employees Treasury Union, Chapter 213.

¹² <https://www.wsj.com/politics/policy/clean-energy-program-fueled-by-biden-takes-deep-staff-cuts-under-trump-57bd06e8?msockid=02b70d00faff6839247d187cfb6b694e>

¹³ <https://democrats-appropriations.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/democrats-appropriations.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/7%20DOE%20Frozen%20Funding%20-%20Loan%20Programs.pdf>

¹⁴ <https://www.energy.gov/lpo/tesla>

¹⁵ <https://www.energy.senate.gov/hearings/2025/1/hearing-to-consider-the-nomination-of-mr-chris-wright-to-be-secretary-of-energy>; at minute 45:47.

In response to another question about how you would respond to an order to commit impoundment, you responded, “My mission, the only way I roll, would be to follow the laws and statutes of the United States of America.”¹⁶ In light of these firings, it is hard not to view that statement, made just weeks ago, as a deliberate evasion.

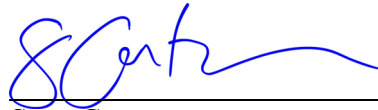
To better understand these actions, which have made America weaker, we request answers to the following questions by March 13th, 2025:

1. Was it your plan to fire these employees?
2. Alternatively, were you directed to fire these employees, and if so, by whom were you directed?
3. Prior to issuing these termination actions, did you or your department conduct any analysis or prepare any report, memorandum, or other document analyzing the positions subject to termination and/or the effects of those terminations on your department’s operations or mission?
4. What criteria were used to determine which positions and employees would be subject to termination?
5. Did you conduct any individualized review of employees’ performance or conduct prior to the issuance of employee termination notices?
6. Were any of the employees who were fired identified for termination as the result of previously-documented deficiencies with their work performance or conduct?
7. Were any terminated employees or putatively-terminated employees notified in writing of performance- or conduct-related cause for their termination before their termination or attempted termination?
8. Prior to issuing termination actions, did you develop a plan for the agency-wide terminations and/or for the continuance of department operations?
9. Were any classified or sensitive department systems accessed in connection with these terminations by individuals without the requisite security clearances or approvals necessary to access such systems?
10. Will you commit to reviewing all future interventions by outside entities in the department's work, including those of the Department of Government Efficiency?
11. Will you oppose any such interventions that do not comply with the law, do not comply with the DOE’s Collective Bargaining Agreement, or do not align with the testimony you provided during your confirmation hearing?
12. Do you plan to make another attempt to fire probationary employees?
13. If so, will the department follow the legal requirements by only terminating employees for specific performance- or conduct-related reasons and with the cause provided to each such employee in writing?
14. Is the department planning reductions in force?
15. If so, does the department plan to follow the legal requirements that constrain reductions in force?
16. Do you plan to implement the laws Congress has imposed on the department, including annual appropriations under which Congress has specified the obligations and current funding of the Department of Energy?
17. How do you propose to “inspire the people in the department” now that your firings have put every one of its public servants in fear for their livelihood?

Thank you for your immediate attention to this critical matter.

Sincerely,

¹⁶ <https://www.energy.senate.gov/hearings/2025/1/hearing-to-consider-the-nomination-of-mr-chris-wright-to-be-secretary-of-energy>; at minute 52:40.



Sean Casten
Member of Congress



Laura Friedman
Member of Congress



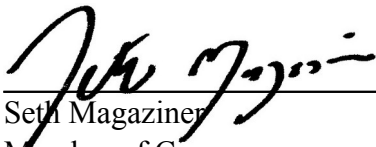
Doris Matsui
Member of Congress



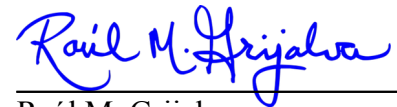
Ed Case
Member of Congress



Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.
Member of Congress



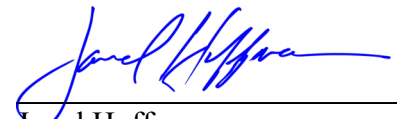
Seth Magaziner
Member of Congress



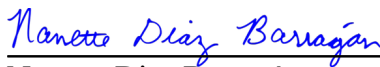
Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress



Ro Khanna
Member of Congress



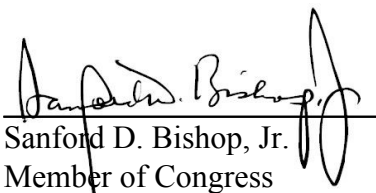
Jared Huffman
Member of Congress



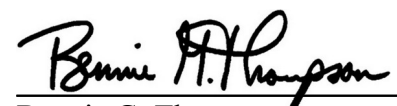
Nanette Diaz Barragán
Member of Congress



Robert Garcia
Member of Congress



Sanford D. Bishop, Jr.
Member of Congress



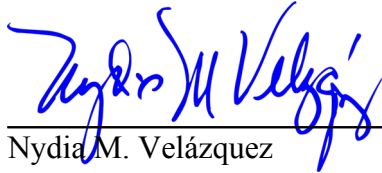
Bennie G. Thompson
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Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress



Andre Carson
Member of Congress



Nydia M. Velázquez
Member of Congress



Rashida Tlaib
Member of Congress



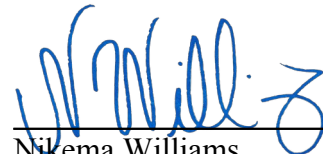
Paul D. Tonko
Member of Congress



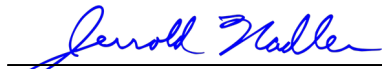
Betty McCollum
Member of Congress




Dina Titus
Member of Congress



Nikema Williams
Member of Congress



Jerrold Nadler
Member of Congress



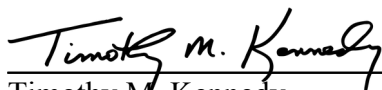
Teresa Leger Fernandez
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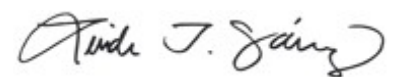
John Garamendi
Member of Congress



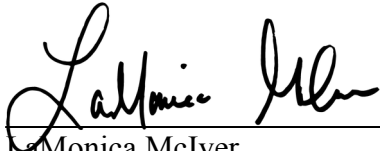
Kevin Mullin
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Timothy M. Kennedy
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Linda T. Sánchez
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LaMonica McIver
Member of Congress



Dwight Evans
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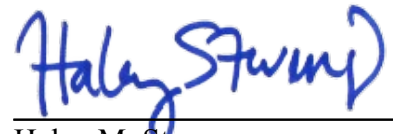
Alma S. Adams, Ph.D.
Member of Congress



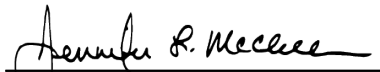
Pramila Jayapal
Member of Congress



Herbert C. Conaway, Jr.
Member of Congress



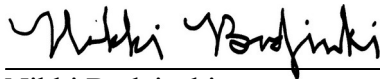
Haley M. Stevens
Member of Congress



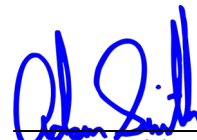
Jennifer L. McClellan
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Maxine Waters
Member of Congress



Nikki Budzinski
Member of Congress



Adam Smith
Member of Congress



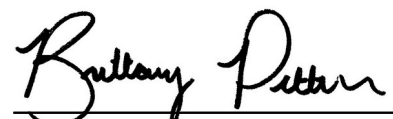
Joe Neguse
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Debbie Wasserman Schultz
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Emanuel Cleaver, II
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Mark Takano
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Raul Ruiz, M.D.
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Sharice L. Davids
Member of Congress



Jan Schakowsky
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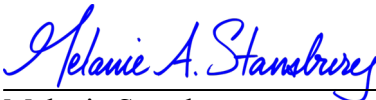
Chrissy Houlahan
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David Scott
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Andrea Salinas
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Melanie Stansbury
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Lizzie Fletcher
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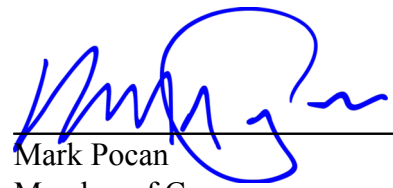
Yvette D. Clarke
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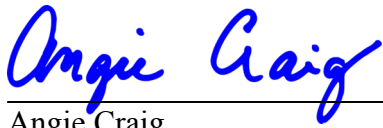
Eric Swalwell
Member of Congress



Morgan McGarvey
Member of Congress



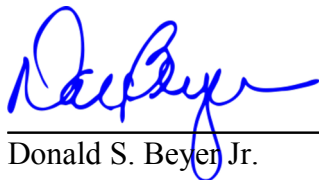
Mark Pocan
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Angie Craig
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Ilhan Omar
Member of Congress



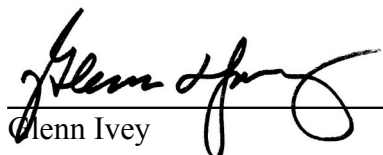
Donald S. Beyer Jr.
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Scott H. Peters
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Julia Brownley
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Glenn Ivey
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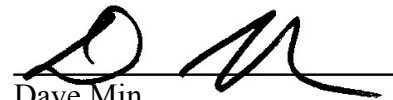
Deborah K. Ross
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Josh Harder
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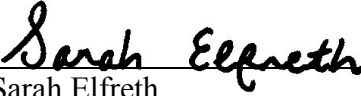
Al Green
Member of Congress
Scion of the Enslaved Africans -
Sacrificed to Make America Great

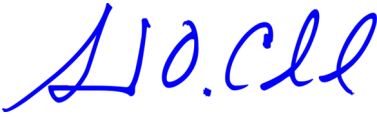



Dave Min
Member of Congress




Kathy Castor
Member of Congress

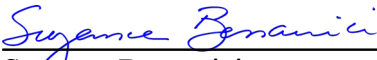

Sarah Elfreth
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Salud Carbajal
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Grace Meng
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Seth Moulton
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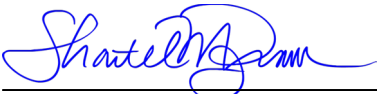

Chris Deluzio
Member of Congress

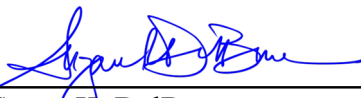

Suzanne Bonamici
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Greg Casar
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Jimmy Panetta
Member of Congress



Suhas Subramanyam
Member of Congress



Shontel M. Brown
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Suzan K. DelBene
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Bill Foster
Member of Congress


Jesús G. "Chuy" García
Member of Congress



Mary Gay Scanlon
Member of Congress




George Whitesides
Member of Congress



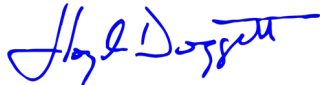
Stephen F. Lynch
Member of Congress



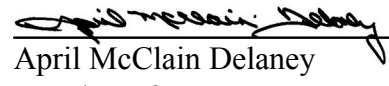
Derek T. Tran
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Marilyn Strickland
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Lloyd Doggett
Member of Congress




April McClain Delaney
Member of Congress




Steny H. Hoyer
Member of Congress




Mike Quigley
Member of Congress



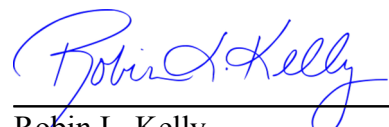
Josh Gottheimer
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Lori Trahan
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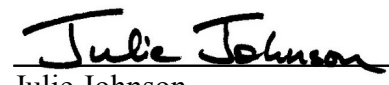
Gabe Amo
Member of Congress



Robin L. Kelly
Member of Congress



Val Hoyle
Member of Congress



Julie Johnson
Member of Congress



Mark DeSaulnier
Member of Congress



Ted W. Lieu
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Mikie Sherrill
Member of Congress



Jamie Raskin
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Marc A. Veasey
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Darren Soto
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Becca Balint
Member of Congress



Chellie Pingree
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Valerie P. Foushee
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Robert C. "Bobby" Scott
Member of Congress



Lauren Underwood
Member of Congress



Diana DeGette
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