

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

January 12, 2026

The Honorable Chris Wright
Secretary
US Department of Energy
1000 Independence Ave SW
Washington, DC 20585

Dear Secretary Wright:

As the Department of Energy (DOE) develops a recommended national policy for the management of spent nuclear fuel (SNF) and high-level nuclear waste (HLW), as directed in the Executive Order *Reinvigorating the Nuclear Industrial Base*, we write to urge you to establish a safe, effective, long-term management program for nuclear waste.

We appreciate your support for the continued collaborative discussions on consolidated storage and your recognition of the importance of an opt-in approach for siting nuclear waste facilities. We hope to work with you to modernize the nuclear waste management program, including developing policies and governance structures that encourage durable state and local collaboration. We believe this work will strongly support the Administration's goal to expand the United States' nuclear energy capacity.

Under the Nuclear Waste Policy Act (NWPA), DOE is responsible for siting, constructing, and operating a permanent repository, subject to Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) licensing and regulatory authority. The federal government—including Congress—has been unable to fulfill these obligations for the last decade. As a result, more than 90,000 metric tons of spent nuclear fuel remain stored at nuclear power plants across the country, costing taxpayers billions of dollars. Moreover, the long-standing political—not technical—impasse has left communities with decommissioned nuclear plants saddled with long-term spent fuel storage—limiting prospects for economic redevelopment.

DOE estimates a remaining financial liability between \$38.6 billion and \$44.3 billion, in addition to the \$12.2 billion already paid, for commercial SNF,¹ and \$23 billion for the DOE's own legacy HLW and SNF.² These liabilities are paid with taxpayer dollars and will continue to grow without decisive action to re-establish a workable nuclear waste program. With the growing prospects of massive nuclear energy growth, the increasing use of new fuel forms and technologies, and the economic needs of communities across the nation, we must take steps to restore and update our national nuclear waste management policy.

We recognize that legislative action will likely be necessary to restore a workable, long-term spent fuel management program, and we stand ready to work in Congress and with the Administration to achieve this.

¹ U.S. Department of Energy, <https://www.energy.gov/ig/articles/financial-statement-audit-doe-oig-26-02>

² U.S. Department of Energy, <https://www.energy.gov/sites/default/files/2024-06/Environmental-Liability-101.pdf>

In the meantime, as DOE develops a recommended national policy on SNF and HLW management, we encourage you to take an important step to re-establish a single-purpose office to manage the spent nuclear fuel program, outside of the Office of Nuclear Energy and with a direct reporting relationship to your office. This is consistent with existing law and will help ensure the priorities for restoring an active nuclear waste management program remain in focus.

The United States has the technical capabilities to be successful in this endeavor, but we must break the current impasse over nuclear waste and develop a workable solution that encourages state collaboration.

We appreciate your consideration of our recommendation and look forward to working with you to advance administrative and legislative solutions to stop wasting taxpayer dollars and fulfill the federal government's responsibility to manage spent nuclear fuel.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Mike Levin", written over a horizontal line.

Mike Levin
Member of Congress

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "August Pfluger", written over a horizontal line.

August Pfluger
Member of Congress

cc: Pete Hegseth, Secretary of Defense

Russell Vought, Director of Office of Management and Budget