

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 11, 2025

The Honorable Gene L. Dodaro
Comptroller General of the United States
Government Accountability Office
441 G Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro,

We write to you today to raise concerns regarding the Department of Energy's recent Secretarial Order titled "Strengthening National Laboratory Efficiency and Mission Execution," announced by Secretary Wright on March 27, 2025. The stated purpose of the Secretarial Order is to remove "red tape" and accelerate mission execution. While the objective of enhancing efficiency is a laudable one, the approach outlined in this order, curtailing oversight and regulatory processes, presents significant risks that warrant thorough evaluation. Specifically, we are concerned that reducing oversight, rather than strengthening it, could lead to greater cost overruns and project delays, ultimately undermining the very mission objectives that this order intends to support.

This new policy seeks to expedite the Department's ability to carry out its projects and initiatives by scaling back existing government controls, particularly those related to procurement, contracting, and oversight. While streamlining processes can indeed be beneficial in certain contexts, the absence of proper federal oversight mechanisms often leads to unintended consequences—cost overruns, inefficiencies, and failures to meet project timelines. The Government Accountability Office (GAO) has consistently highlighted the importance of strong project management and oversight in federal projects, particularly in areas as complex and high-stakes as those under the purview of the Department.

The Department is responsible for an extensive range of activities, including managing nuclear facilities, clean energy initiatives, and critical infrastructure. Each of these areas requires detailed oversight, rigorous financial controls, and transparent decision-making processes to ensure that taxpayer dollars are spent effectively. Reducing these safeguards in the name of efficiency could expose these programs to a higher risk of financial mismanagement and project failure, as we

have seen with past projects where inadequate supervision led to significant delays and budget overruns.

GAO's body of work underscores the importance of maintaining a balance between the need for speed and the need for accountability. And the Department's own tracking confirms the risk. For example, 53 percent – representing over \$24 billion – of the Department's total project portfolio is currently at risk or expected to breach its performance baseline. Without sufficient oversight, there is a higher likelihood that projects will not meet their cost estimates or will fail to be completed within the allocated timelines. These issues can be especially pronounced in large-scale, long-term projects, where the absence of regular evaluations and assessments creates opportunities for waste, fraud, and abuse.

Furthermore, an “accelerated mission execution” culture risks prioritizing expediency over quality, safety, and long-term sustainability. For instance, the rush to move projects forward without adequate risk assessments or regulatory reviews could expose the Department to safety hazards, environmental risks, and long-term maintenance burdens that are costly to correct down the line. This risk is heightened given the high-hazard activities of the National Nuclear Security Administration, which involve nuclear weapons and radiation safety, and the Office of Environmental Management, which include addressing the cleanup and safe disposal of radioactive waste.

Given these concerns, we respectfully request the GAO to review the potential implications of this Secretarial Order on the Department of Energy's major programs and projects. Specifically, we ask that your office evaluate whether the removal of key oversight measures could increase the likelihood of cost overruns that cost Americans taxpayers and whether these changes provide sufficient safeguards to prevent waste, fraud, and abuse and protect taxpayer interests.

We look forward to your insights on this matter and any recommendations your office might provide to mitigate these risks.

Sincerely,



Marcy Kaptur
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Energy
and Water Development
House Committee on Appropriations



Patty Murray
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Energy
and Water Development
Senate Committee on Appropriations