

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 16, 2026

The Honorable Christopher Wright
Secretary
U.S. Department of Energy
1000 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20585

Dear Secretary Wright:

We write regarding the Department of Energy’s (the Department or DOE) ongoing efforts to modify operating directives for the Department’s National Laboratories, plants, and sites, an effort you have branded “Project Velocity.” On August 13, 2026, DOE announced it updated operating directives, which included revisions to 46 DOE Directives and cancellation of four DOE Directives.¹ We are deeply concerned that the scope and pace of these simultaneous changes will weaken critical safety protections, reduce independent Federal oversight, impair public visibility into departmental operations, and transfer significant responsibility from Federal officials to contractors without adequate safeguards in place. In short, we are worried the rollback of these changes could jeopardize the safety of work being conducted across the DOE enterprise and waste taxpayer dollars.

We are particularly concerned about these changes given the Department’s longstanding challenges overseeing its contractors and managing major projects and programs. At our request, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) recently examined the Department’s earlier effort to streamline project management at the National Laboratories and nuclear security sites (which is just one of the 50 DOE directives that have been revised or cancelled to date through Project Velocity).² GAO found that the Department had not established specific goals or performance measures to evaluate the overall effectiveness of implementing the Secretary’s directed revisions. This is concerning given that GAO also concluded that the proposed streamlining could result in less reliable project cost estimates and late identification of cost and schedule overruns—wasting time and taxpayer resources. Without reliable performance metrics and goals, cost increases and schedule slips as a result of the efforts to streamline may be harder to detect and mitigate.

You are now championing sweeping revisions to Departmental directives with Project Velocity, but GAO’s recent findings are cause for real concern about how these changes will be implemented and evaluated over time. The Department claims the current initiative is a shift from “prescriptive procedural compliance” toward “performance-based accountability” and that modernization will maintain strong safety and security standards. Yet the Department is simultaneously revising or eliminating important requirements governing independent oversight,

¹ <https://www.energy.gov/articles/energy-department-modernizes-national-laboratory-operations-strengthen-america-scientific>

² <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-26-108520>

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project management, quality assurance, conduct of operations, nuclear facility safety, worker training and qualification, occurrence reporting, environmental and occupational safety reporting, and the ability of Federal and contractor employees to formally challenge technical safety decisions. The Department must demonstrate—not merely assert—that these changes will preserve effective Federal oversight and safety mechanisms.

We are particularly concerned by the Department’s decision to wholesale cancel several DOE orders including DOE Order 231.1B, *Environment, Safety and Health Reporting*; DOE Order 232.2A, *Occurrence Reporting and Processing of Operations Information*; and DOE Order 442.2, *Differing Professional Opinions for Technical Issues Involving Environmental, Safety, and Health Technical Concerns*.

Department-wide reporting requirements (such as those in Order 231.1B and Order 232.2A) provide Congress, regulators, and the public with standardized information necessary to identify trends and evaluate safety performance across the National Laboratories, plants, and sites. Fragmenting these reporting requirements or replacing them with locally determined processes risks making it significantly more difficult to identify recurring problems, compare performance across sites, and recognize emerging Department-wide safety concerns. Congress also cannot effectively conduct oversight if the Department no longer collects consistent information about what is occurring across the enterprise. A reduction in reporting burden that results in the loss of accessible information about safety incidents or worker injuries is not simply an administrative change—it is a clear reduction in transparency that places safety at risk. Furthermore, eliminating these standardized safety and health databases at the very moment the Department executes the sweeping deregulatory initiatives of Project Velocity creates a dangerous diagnostic blind spot, making it impossible to empirically measure whether these systemic rollbacks are actively causing an increase in accidents, toxic exposures, or operational failures across the complex.

The Department’s cancellation of DOE Order 442.2, *Differing Professional Opinions for Technical Issues Involving Environmental, Safety, and Health Technical Concerns* similarly guts a critical safety process. The formal Differing Professional Opinion process provided a structured mechanism for such disagreements to receive independent technical consideration outside the ordinary management chain. Eliminating that process raises serious questions about whether workers and safety professionals will continue to have an effective mechanism to challenge decisions they believe could jeopardize worker safety or public safety. Other Departmental dispute-resolution or scientific-integrity processes cannot simply be presumed to provide adequate substitutes for a process specifically designed to address technical environmental, safety, and health disagreements.

Accordingly, we request that the Department immediately reinstate DOE Order 231.1B, DOE Order 232.2A, and DOE Order 442.2.

We also have significant concerns regarding the 46 DOE Directives the Department has chosen to revise governing high-consequence operations, worker safety, project management, and Federal oversight. The Department cannot execute such sweeping systemic changes across

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multibillion-dollar facilities without providing the empirical baselines, safety analyses, and governance frameworks that justify them.

To evaluate the cumulative operational and safety risks of Project Velocity, please provide the following information **within 30 days of the date of this letter**:

1. A complete list of every requirement modified, eliminated, consolidated, transferred, or otherwise affected by the operational modernization effort, including a redline comparison of each revised directive against its predecessor.
2. For each eliminated or materially modified requirement, the Department's justification for the change, including the statutory, regulatory, technical, scientific, or operational basis relied upon.
3. A complete description of the process used to develop and approve the 46 directive revisions and four cancellations.
4. An explanation of the role of Department officials and offices, the Defense Nuclear Facilities Safety Board (DNFSB), the Office of Environment, Health, Safety, and Security (EHSS), and the Office of Enterprise Assessments in reviewing and approving the changes, including the criteria used to determine that each revision or cancellation would not adversely affect nuclear safety, worker safety, security, environmental protection, project performance, or Federal oversight.
5. An explanation of the role of, or consultations undertaken with, National Laboratories, management and operating (M&O) contractors, subject matter experts, worker representatives, labor unions, safety organizations, and other entities, in reviewing and approving the changes, including the criteria used to determine that each revision or cancellation would not adversely affect nuclear safety, worker safety, security, environmental protection, project performance, or Federal oversight.
6. For DOE Order 231.1B and DOE Order 232.2A, a crosswalk identifying which reporting requirements, thresholds, and other data within these Orders have been incorporated into other directives, and which have been eliminated or delegated to local contractor discretion.
7. For DOE Order 231.1B and DOE Order 232.2A, an explanation of how the Department will conduct complex-wide trend analysis, benchmarking, and early warning detection across National Laboratories and sites without standardized enterprise databases.
8. For DOE Order 231.1B and DOE Order 232.2A, the specific contractual and legal mechanisms DOE line management will use to enforce timely incident reporting and data submission in the absence of these orders.

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9. A description of any changes to Occurrence Reporting and Processing System (ORPS), Computerized Accident Incident Reporting System (CAIRS), Radiation Exposure Monitoring System (REMS), or other safety and occurrence reporting systems resulting directly or indirectly from Project Velocity, including any changes in reporting thresholds, categories, timeframes, required data elements, public accessibility, or governmental review.
10. For DOE Order 442.2, an explanation of what process now permits a Federal or contractor employee to formally challenge an environmental, safety, health, engineering, maintenance, or operational technical decision; how that process ensures independence from the management officials whose decision is being challenged; and what protections exist against retaliation.
11. A detailed crosswalk identifying which provisions of DOE Order 442.2, if any, the Department believes have been preserved elsewhere, including the authority and process for independent technical review and final disposition of differing professional opinions.
12. For each revised directive affecting nuclear safety, worker safety, quality assurance, conduct of operations, training and qualification, readiness, maintenance, emergency management, or independent oversight, an assessment of the safety functions or controls removed or modified and the basis for the Department's determination that the revised requirements provide equivalent or greater protection.
13. A list of all Contractor Requirements Documents or other requirements that have been eliminated, reduced, or replaced as part of Project Velocity, together with an explanation of how the Department plans to verify contractor performance in the absence of those requirements.
14. A description of every new or expanded authority provided to M&O contractors or National Laboratory directors under the revised directives, including any authority previously exercised by Federal officials, and the circumstances under which DOE may revoke or reassume that authority.
15. For DOE Order 413.3C, a list of all projects for which critical decision or other project management authority has been, or is expected to be, delegated to M&O contractor personnel, including total project cost, current project status, responsible contractor, and the Federal reviews and approvals that will no longer occur as a result of that delegation.
16. For DOE Order 414.1F, an explanation of the basis for reducing the deemed-approved period for Quality Assurance Programs from 90 days to 30 days; the number of Quality Assurance Programs that DOE historically has taken more than 30 days to review; and what safeguards will prevent a deficient program from becoming effective solely because DOE failed to complete its review within the required period.

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17. A description of how the Office of Enterprise Assessments, the DNFSB, and other independent Federal oversight organizations will maintain their ability to conduct independent assessments when warranted, including whether any revised directive limits such reviews because a contractor or another Departmental office or program has previously assessed the same activity.
18. The specific, outcome-oriented goals and performance measures that will be used to evaluate Project Velocity department-wide, including baseline data against which changes in cost, schedule, safety performance, worker injuries, project performance, and other outcomes will be measured.
19. A description of how the Department will identify unintended consequences of the changes, including deterioration in safety performance or loss of visibility into contractor operations, and the thresholds or criteria that would cause the Department to restore a requirement or otherwise modify a revised directive.
20. All analyses, risk assessments, business cases, cost-benefit analyses, safety reviews, legal reviews, crosswalks, decision memoranda, and other documents used to support the 46 directive revisions and four cancellations.

We recognize the importance of ensuring that the Department's requirements are efficient, current, and appropriately tailored to risk. We share those goals. However, efficiency cannot come at the expense of independent oversight, reliable information, technical rigor, and the worker protections necessary to safely operate the Department's unique facilities and effectively and responsibly steward billions of taxpayer dollars.

The Department's reliance on contractors makes strong Federal oversight more—not less—important. The Department should proceed cautiously before removing systems developed over decades to ensure that Federal officials, Congress, and the workforce can identify problems before they become accidents, project failures, or significant taxpayer liabilities.

We look forward to your response within 30 days.

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