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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6150

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COLIN HAYES, STAFF DIRECTOR
PATRICK J. McCORMICK III, CHIEF COUNSEL
ANGELA BECKER-DIPPMANN, DEMOCRATIC STAFF DIRECTOR
SAM E. FOWLER, DEMOCRATIC CHIEF COUNSEL

The Honorable Mike Pence
Vice President-Elect of the United States
Presidential Transition Office
1800 F Street, NW
Washington, DC 20006

Dear Vice President-Elect Pence:

My constituents and others across the nation are anxious about the next Administration's intentions for the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), especially now that the President-elect has announced he intends to nominate as the next Secretary someone who has called for the Department to be abolished.

The President-elect's Transition Team recently sent a document to DOE asking 74 questions focused on DOE responsibilities and programs. I understand that yesterday a spokesperson announced that the Presidential Transition Office had not authorized the document to be submitted to DOE.

Nevertheless, these questions plainly reflect the thinking of a Transition Team that appears hostile, in part, to the Department's mission and programs. I have already expressed my deep concern about those questions suggesting that the next Administration may intend to single-out Department civil servants and contractors that worked on several Obama Administration initiatives. I will not allow this to happen.

I think it is important to set the record straight on several issues, beyond the implied threat to DOE's employees and contractors, which were also raised in the questions sent to DOE.

Energy Information Administration Independence

The Transition Team asked 15 separate questions about the Energy Information Administration (EIA), including inquiring into the agency's independence and the work EIA did to calculate the potential impacts of the Clean Power Plan. The questions also seem to express the Transition Team's displeasure with EIA's determination that renewable energy resources, such as solar and wind, are becoming increasingly cost-effective.

EIA is, by law, independent from the rest of DOE. The mission of EIA is to collect, analyze, and disseminate independent and impartial energy information to promote sound policymaking, efficient markets, and public understanding of energy and its interaction with the economy and the environment. EIA is the nation's premier source of energy information and, by law, its data, analyses, and forecasts are independent of approval by any other officer or employee of the U.S. government. Congress consciously structured EIA so as to ensure its data gathering and analysis were kept independent from

policy formulation and advocacy so that policy considerations do not influence EIA's objectivity. It is imperative that EIA remain independent and is protected against political interference.

Nuclear Weapons Complex Cleanup

The Transition Team sought information as to the "right funding level" for DOE's Environmental Management program, which includes the ongoing cleanup of our nation's nuclear weapons complex. The Hanford site, located in Washington state, represents the largest cleanup operation in the U.S. and, arguably, the most technically challenging on the planet. My constituents that live near the Hanford site and the residents across the Pacific Northwest who rely on the Columbia River for its many contributions to the regional economy are concerned that the next Administration may not sufficiently understand the importance of this effort. The incoming Administration will need to come to appreciate the World War II and Cold War-era history of the site, where plutonium production in support of our national defense occurred for more than 40 years. The long-running nature of the production effort, variable plutonium processing techniques, the resulting heterogeneity of the waste and the way in which its radiological and chemical characteristics continue to change over time, are among the factors contributing to the complexity of the cleanup effort.

In order to fulfill the cleanup mission at Hanford, DOE must complete work on the Waste Treatment and Immobilization Plant. This facility will be responsible for the vitrification of high-activity and low-activity tank waste that has over time contaminated both water and soil at the site. The completion of the Waste Treatment and Immobilization Plant will ensure the safety and well-being of those who live both in the Tri-Cities community and in communities downstream of Hanford along the Columbia River.

Congress has repeatedly supported the legal and moral obligations of the federal government to clean up Hanford and the other nuclear weapons complex sites. The next Administration should be equally as supportive. Proper funding not only will continue the decontamination of the site, but it also will ensure that worker safety is achieved during these dangerous cleanup operations.

Nuclear Nonproliferation

The Transition Team questions indicate a desire to reduce "bureaucratic burdens" associated with exporting commercial nuclear technology. I do not believe DOE is imposing a burden on exporters by trying to prevent terrorists and rogue nations from acquiring nuclear and radiological material. What the Transition Team terms "bureaucratic burdens" is what keeps our nuclear materials and technology out of the hands of terrorists and rogue states that mean us harm. They are the product of a bipartisan consensus that dates back to the early years of the Eisenhower Administration.

Nuclear nonproliferation is an important mission throughout the Department. The National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) Defense Nuclear Nonproliferation (DNN) program is critical to the security of the U.S. The NNSA works with the National Laboratories to provide partner countries and the International Atomic Energy Agency with subject matter expertise in areas such as export control training, international safeguards engagement, and the installation of essential radiation detection equipment at land borders, airports, and seaports around the world.

National Laboratories

The Transition Team document includes a series of questions regarding the DOE National Laboratories related to operations, evaluations, private partnerships, and personnel. The Department has been taking important steps to improve the effectiveness of the National Labs. The Labs constitute a comprehensive research network of national assets that have made profound contributions to the Nation's security, scientific leadership, and economic competitiveness. The Commission to Review the Effectiveness of the National Energy Laboratories stated: "the National Laboratories provide critical capabilities and facilities in service of DOE's mission, the needs of the broader national science and technology (S&T) community, and the Nation as a whole." As the Commission recommended, the incoming Administration and future Congress should provide the necessary resources to maintain critical capabilities and facilities of the National Labs.

The Pacific Northwest National Laboratory (PNNL) contributes heavily to the DNN mission and other key energy, science and infrastructure security programs. PNNL recognizes there is an ever-increasing need to ensure that world leading safeguards, verification, and monitoring technology is available to meet the challenges ahead.

The National Labs prevent terrorists from obtaining, transporting, and deploying nuclear devices and support from the incoming Administration is needed to protect U.S. citizens and our allies.

Electric Grid Modernization and Cybersecurity

The Transition Team asked about the goal of DOE's role in cybersecurity, as well as the termination date for the Department's Grid Modernization Initiative. Grid modernization efforts have long enjoyed strong bipartisan support, consistent with the need to upgrade our nation's critical infrastructure. It should also be noted that the Senate earlier this year voted 85-12 in favor of energy legislation that would have expanded several DOE grid modernization programs and extended their authorization for an additional decade. This legislation also included provisions establishing DOE's role as the sector-specific agency with responsibility for securing the cyber security of critical energy infrastructure, and proposing a decade-long initiative to ensure public private cyber research and development efforts tied to emerging threats. In addition, the bill would have enhanced both supply chain security efforts and data-sharing with private sector infrastructure operators.

The electrification of our economy has made businesses and consumers increasingly reliant on affordable, reliable, and secure electric service. Much of the electric grid was designed and built many years before power quality became a key consideration for advanced manufacturing and high-technology products; and before the advent of technologies such as energy storage, distributed generation, and "smart" buildings and appliances could have ever been thought feasible. Combined with the fact that grid operators are under constant threat of attacks from hackers and hostile state actors seeking to cause widespread power outages, the question should not be, "when will DOE's Grid Modernization Initiative end?" Rather, the next Administration should ask itself what can be done to expand this program.

Mission Innovation

The Transition Team asked for information as to who “owns” the Mission Innovation program within the Department of Energy. Mission Innovation is an initiative that spans across DOE programs and even across other Federal agencies.

In November 2015, leaders of 20 countries committed to doubling the public funding for energy research and development (R&D) over five years. Building on that commitment, Bill Gates, Jeff Bezos, and other business leaders recently formed Breakthrough Energy Ventures to invest more than \$1 billion in early stage and growth companies for energy technologies. The Federal commitment to energy R&D is less than one-half of 1 percent of what consumers in this nation pay each year for energy. Increasing energy innovation is a policy with broad bipartisan support. We must re-assert our American exceptionalism and invest in all energy technologies that are known to create jobs and grow the economy.

Energy Efficiency

One question sought information on the statutory basis for DOE’s energy efficiency standards program for appliances. The appliance standards program has been extremely successful. DOE estimates that the existing efficiency standards will, by 2030, have saved 132 quadrillion BTUs of energy and save consumers nearly \$2 trillion on their utility bills. In comparison, the entire U.S. economy uses about 100 quadrillion BTUs in a year.

The Energy Policy and Conservation Act requires DOE to establish minimum energy efficiency standards for 19 specific types of appliances and equipment used in homes, businesses, and other applications. In addition, the Department has authority to establish efficiency standards for other products the Secretary determines qualify as eligible. We have made a significant amount of progress in enhancing the nation’s energy efficiency, and I will not support a rollback of the appliance efficiency program.

The issues outlined here describe many of the vital and diverse functions of the Department of Energy. Rather than dismantling these capabilities, it is my hope that the next Administration will share my view that it is in America’s best interests for the Department to succeed in its missions.

Sincerely,



Maria Cantwell
Ranking Member