

October 9, 2026

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

Secretary Wright:

I write to request information regarding the operational safety and structural integrity of the Strategic Petroleum Reserve (SPR). In April, I wrote to you to express concern regarding the Administration's ill-advised decision to enter into a war with Iran.¹ I asked you about the Department's preparedness before the Trump administration launched its war in Iran, including if the Department conducted any analysis related to potential SPR releases. The Department failed to substantively respond to my questions. I am deeply concerned by reports that recent drawdowns of the SPR could damage the salt caverns that hold millions of barrels of America's emergency crude.²

In 1975, Congress created the SPR to reduce the impact of petroleum supply disruptions on Americans.³ The SPR is not only an energy security measure, but a national security asset in times of crisis. It is designed to hold nearly 714 million barrels.⁴ For the first time in over 40 years, however, the SPR has now reportedly dropped to under 300 million barrels of emergency inventory.⁵ In March, weeks after the U.S. entered into war with Iran, President Trump authorized the release of 172 million barrels from the SPR.⁶ As a result of that drawdown, the SPR currently sits at 283.8 million barrels—the lowest level since 1982.⁷ The SPR is expected to dip below 250 million barrels once the drawdown concludes.⁸ Some analysts have suggested that depleting the SPR to less than 300 million barrels risks damage to the salt caverns. In a June 2026 report, the Government Accountability Office found that "[r]epeated partial drawdowns followed by refill can leach a single part of a cavern repeatedly, leading to undesirable shapes."⁹ The same report warned that the SPR is at risk of failing to safeguard the U.S. from severe petroleum supply disruptions.

In response to the ongoing war in Iran and the consequences of draining vital energy inventories crucial to U.S. energy and national security, I am introducing legislation that mandates long-term planning for the

¹ "Letter from Ranking Member Martin Heinrich to Department of Energy Secretary Chris Wright," United States Senate. April 14, 2026. <https://www.energy.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/media/doc/Iran%20Letter%20to%20Wright.pdf>.

² "Depleted strategic oil reserves nears level that raises concerns about damage to caverns, operations," CNBC. August 15, 2026. <https://www.cnbc.com/2026/08/15/strategic-petroleum-reserve-spr-oil-iran-war-caverns.html>.

³ "SPR Origins," US Department of Energy. <https://www.energy.gov/hgeo/opr/spr-origins>.

⁴ "SPR Quick Facts," US Department of Energy. <https://www.energy.gov/hgeo/opr/spr-quick-facts>.

⁵ "Depleted strategic oil reserves nears level that raises concerns about damage to caverns, operations," CNBC. August 15, 2026. <https://www.cnbc.com/2026/08/15/strategic-petroleum-reserve-spr-oil-iran-war-caverns.html>.

⁶ "United States to release 172 million barrels of oil from the strategic petroleum reserve," <https://www.energy.gov/articles/united-states-release-172-million-barrels-oil-strategic-petroleum-reserve>; "IEA announces record oil stockpile release over oil Iran war supply disruption," March 11, 2026. <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/iea-proposes-largest-ever-oil-release-strategic-reserves-wsj-reports-2026-03-11/>.

⁷ "Department of Energy SPR reserve inventory," <https://www.spr.doe.gov/dir/dir.html>. As of September 25, 2026; "Oil stocks in US strategic petroleum reserve fall to lowest level since 1982," Reuters. September 21, 2026. <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/oil-stocks-us-strategic-petroleum-reserve-fall-lowest-level-since-1982-2026-09-21/>.

⁸ "Depleted strategic oil reserves nears level that raises concerns about damage to caverns, operations," CNBC. August 15, 2026. <https://www.cnbc.com/2026/08/15/strategic-petroleum-reserve-spr-oil-iran-war-caverns.html>.

⁹ Congress and DOE need a unified plan to align priorities and investments for the strategic petroleum reserve," Government Accountability Office. June 26, 2026. <https://files.gao.gov/reports/GAO-26-106918/index.html>.

SPR and limits non-emergency SPR sales to avoid further operational inefficiencies, including straining aging infrastructure during ongoing capital projects.

To better understand DOE's current management of the SPR, I request that you provide the following information by October 23, 2026:

1. Since January 20, 2025, all Department analysis and reviews conducted to understand the impact and consequences of drawdowns of the SPR to the operational safety and structural integrity of the SPR.
2. Since January 20, 2025, all Department analysis and reviews conducted to understand the impact and consequences of drawing down the SPR below 300 million barrels.
3. Since January 20, 2025, all Department analysis and reviews conducted to understand the operational minimum of the SPR.
4. A current and complete list of all major maintenance projects underway or scheduled over the next 10 years.
5. A current and complete list and schedule of exchange returns, including premium barrels, as part of the March 2026 release.
6. A copy of the new contract with the new SPR Operator and all documents on the handoff to the new contractor documenting the current state of the SPR and any related inspections at this time by either party.
7. A list of all buyers and amounts sold from the SPR in 2026.
8. A list of all potential new cavern sites analyzed by the DOE for future development.
9. A list of the backlog of maintenance projects for the SPR as currently pending.
10. A copy of the contract and all audits performed by the current DOE Auditor for the SPR and any sale of oil activities.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this request. As our energy demand increases, we need to ensure the SPR is properly maintained, fully operational, and can be counted on when supply is constrained. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact my staff at (202) 224-4971.

Sincerely,



MARTIN HEINRICH
United States Senator