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Washington, DC 20548

Acting Comptroller General  
of the United States

July 2, 2026

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

### Priority Open Recommendations: Department of Energy

Dear Secretary Wright:

The purpose of this letter is to call your personal attention to three areas where open recommendations to the Department of Energy (DOE) should be given high priority.

In January 2026, we reported that, on a government-wide basis, 77 percent of our recommendations made 5 years ago were implemented.<sup>1</sup> DOE's recommendation implementation rate was 73 percent. As of June 2026, DOE has 270 open recommendations, including 24 priority recommendations.<sup>2</sup> Since our April 2025 letter, DOE implemented 5 priority recommendations.<sup>3</sup> I appreciate DOE's continued commitment to addressing our recommendations, which will better position the department to more effectively and efficiently achieve its mission.

We are highlighting the following areas that warrant your timely and focused attention:

- **Addressing nuclear modernization challenges.** DOE's National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) has faced significant delays and cost overruns in its efforts to modernize the nation's nuclear security enterprise and the weapons in the U.S. stockpile. In 2025, the Congressional Budget Office estimated this effort will cost DOE \$295 billion over the next 10 years. To help strengthen its management of the complex and multibillion dollar plutonium pit production modernization program, [we recommended](#) that NNSA develop a life cycle cost estimate for establishing its pit production capability that aligns with GAO best practices for cost estimating.
- **Addressing DOE environmental liabilities.** The federal government's environmental liability—an area on our [High Risk List](#)—has been growing for the past 20 years and is likely

<sup>1</sup>GAO, *Performance and Accountability Report, Fiscal Year 2025*, [GAO-26-900644](#) (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 29, 2026).

<sup>2</sup>GAO considers a recommendation to be a priority if when implemented, it may significantly improve government operations, for example, by realizing large dollar savings; eliminating mismanagement, fraud, and abuse; or making progress toward addressing a high-risk or duplication issue.

<sup>3</sup>GAO, *Priority Open Recommendations: Department of Energy*, [GAO-25-108093](#) (Washington, D.C.: April 11, 2025). In this letter, we identified 30 priority recommendations. Since then, in addition to the 5 that were implemented, the priority status was removed from two recommendations, and we added one new priority recommendation.

to continue to increase. DOE is responsible for \$538.6 billion of the federal government's total \$667.3 billion reported environmental liability for fiscal year 2025. To help DOE save billions in cleanup costs and accelerate the cleanup process, we [recommended](#) that DOE develop complex-wide analyses that identify optimal waste disposal strategies and alternatives.

- **Managing energy security and programs.** U.S. energy infrastructure and supplies face risks from adverse weather and geopolitical events that affect the nation's economic and national security. We [recommended](#) that DOE conduct periodic reviews of the Strategic Petroleum Reserve to provide Congress with timely information regarding costs and benefits of various reserve sizes to help ensure national energy security. We also [recommended](#) improving DOE's oversight of its large nuclear energy demonstration projects, which would help improve project performance and better ensure consistent implementation of project management best practices.

In addition, several of these recommendations would help address challenges with [acquisition and program management for NNSA and DOE's Office of Environmental Management](#), an area on GAO's [High Risk List](#).<sup>4</sup> Several other government-wide high risk areas have direct implications for DOE and its operations, including [ensuring the cybersecurity of the nation](#). We also identified actions DOE should take to reduce fragmentation, overlap, and duplication. For example, we [recommended](#) DOE pause work at a waste treatment facility at Hanford until it takes several actions, including considering the results of an independent analysis of high-level waste treatment options, potentially saving billions. More information on our [Duplication and Cost Savings](#) work can be found on the GAO website.

A comprehensive list of open recommendations, including new priority recommendations, and information about their status can be found on the GAO website at [Recommendations Database | U.S. GAO](#). Copies of this letter are being sent to the appropriate congressional committees.<sup>5</sup> This letter will also be available at [Priority Recommendations | U.S. GAO](#).

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<sup>4</sup>This list identifies government operations with greater vulnerabilities to fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement. GAO, *High-Risk Series: Heightened Attention Could Save Billions More and Improve Government Efficiency and Effectiveness*, [GAO-25-107743](#) (Washington, D.C.: February 25, 2025).

<sup>5</sup>We also help Congress identify congressional oversight actions that can help agencies implement priority recommendations, such as incorporating them into legislation. James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023, Pub. L. No. 117-263, § 7211(a)(2), 136 Stat. 2395, 3668 (2022) (codified at 31 U.S.C. § 719 note). Congress can also use its budget, appropriations, and oversight processes to incentivize executive branch agencies to act on our recommendations and monitor their progress. For example, Congress can hold hearings focused on agencies' progress in implementing priority recommendations, withhold funds when appropriate, or take other actions to provide incentives for agencies to act.

We would welcome an opportunity to discuss how to address our open recommendations, as we pursue the shared goal of working to increase efficiency and effectiveness of government programs and spending. Please do not hesitate to contact me or Allison Bawden, Managing Director, Natural Resources and Environment Team at [BawdenA@gao.gov](mailto:BawdenA@gao.gov). Contact points for our offices of Congressional Relations and Media Relations may be found on the last page of this letter. Thank you for your personal attention to these important issues.

Sincerely,

**//SIGNED//**

Orice Williams Brown  
Acting Comptroller General  
of the United States

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