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Committee on Armed Services

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TO RECEIVE TESTIMONY ON THE DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY AND NATIONAL NUCLEAR SECURITY ADMINISTRATION ATOMIC ENERGY DEFENSE ACTIVITIES IN REVIEW OF THE DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION REQUEST FOR FISCAL YEAR 2027 AND THE FUTURE YEARS NUCLEAR SECURITY PROGRAM

Wednesday, May 13, 0226

U.S. Senate
Committee on Armed Services
Washington, D.C.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:30 a.m., in Room SD-G50, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Roger Wicker, chairman of the committee, presiding.

Committee Members Present: Senators Wicker, Fischer, Rounds, Ernst, Scott, Banks, Sheehy, Moody, Reed, Shaheen, Gillibrand, Blumenthal, Rosen, and Kelly.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. ROGER WICKER, U.S. SENATOR FROM MISSISSIPPI

Chairman Wicker: This hearing will come to order. Today we are joined by the Secretary of Energy, Mr. Chris Wright; the Administrator for Nuclear Security, Mr. Brandon Williams; and the Assistant Secretary of Energy for Environmental Management, Mr. Timothy Walsh. Welcome to all three of you. I want to thank you for appearing today and for your willingness to serve your fellow Americans.

The United States prevailed in the Cold War because we maintained a credible nuclear deterrent, a strong conventional military, and the unmatched scientific and industrial strength of our economy. Over time, the free world proved that economic vitality, paired with commitment to peace through strength, can outlast even the most dangerous authoritarian regimes. And today they are still out there.

We face a far more complex and dangerous world. The United States and its allies now face multiple nuclear-armed adversaries, each seeking to reshape the international order and undermine our security and prosperity. More criminal, Vladimir Putin, continues to wield the world's largest and most diverse nuclear arsenal. Despite the strain of his unprovoked war in Ukraine, Russia continues to modernize its nuclear forces. Putin is field

new, destabilizing weapons and maintaining a production capacity that in key areas vastly exceeds our own in the United States. Moscow's reckless nuclear ambitions stretch from the sea floor all the way into orbit, and frankly, it threatens our very existence.

At the same time, Beijing is engaged in an unprecedented nuclear expansion. Under Xi Jinping, China is moving well beyond a minimum deterrent. Instead, China is building a far larger and more sophisticated nuclear force. It has rapidly constructed hundreds of new missile silos, expanded mobile missile and ballistic missile submarine forces, and invested in long-range bombers. All of these measures flow from, and to, a strategy designed to surpass the United States in the coming decade.

China is executing this nuclear buildup alongside a broader military industrial surge. China's dominance in shipbuilding, critical minerals, and key dual-use technologies reflects a deliberate effort to translate economic strength into long-term military advantage. I will note that deterrence is expensive, but this is a competition we cannot afford to lose.

The Department of Energy and the National Nuclear Security Administration sit at the center of these challenges, hence our hearing today. Much of the nuclear security enterprise still relies on infrastructure dating

back to the Manhattan Project. Efforts to recapitalize that infrastructure, restore plutonium pit production, and modernize the stockpile are behind schedule, at a time when demands on the enterprises are growing.

At the same time, the Department is executing several critical national security initiatives. These include advancing multiple warhead modernization programs, sustaining the Naval Reactors Program that underpins our sea-based deterrence, promoting artificial intelligence research, and developing advanced nuclear energy technologies to enhance resilience at military installations and support future operational needs.

But the central question remains, are we moving with sufficient urgency? Our adversaries are expanding and modernizing their forces at a pace that should trouble every member of this Committee. I believe the gentlemen we hear from today are working to get us back on track. If we intend to preserve a credible deterrent, assure our allies, and prevent conflict, we must align our policies, budgets, and industrial capacity with today's realities. This does not come on the cheap, and we must do so quickly, because we are running out of time.

Before I conclude I will say this. Given the urgency of the moment I confess that I am troubled by the Department's failure to request funding for the Nuclear

Sea-Launched Cruise Missile warhead program, despite explicit statutory direction to accelerate that effort, direction which came from last year's National Defense Authorization Act, passed by both houses of the Congress, signed into law by President Donald J. Trump. This is not a policy disagreement. It is simply a matter of complying with the statutory law. The United States cannot afford to forego credible, flexible response options while our adversaries' nuclear forces grow day by day. I expect our witnesses to discuss this, to explain this decision, and outline how they will move quickly to correct it. Perhaps an early question there.

Otherwise, I look forward to hearing from our witnesses about how this Committee can help instill a greater sense of urgency across the Department of Energy, the broader national security enterprise, how we can rebuild the scientific and industrial foundation that underpins our deterrent, and what specific steps are needed now to ensure the United States remains capable of deterring our adversaries, now and into the future.

With that I turn to my friend and colleague, Senator Jack Reed.

STATEMENT OF HON. JACK REED, U.S. SENATOR FROM RHODE ISLAND

Senator Reed: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and Secretary Wright, Administrator Williams, and Assistant Secretary Walsh, welcome. Thank you for your service. And please convey my thanks to the workforce at NNSA. They have dedicated themselves to maintaining our nuclear security, and they do a fabulous job.

Secretary Wright, I want to briefly address the conflict in Iran. You have been directly involved in managing the fallout from the war, including the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, oil supply disruptions, and the cascading effect on energy prices in the United States and for American families. According to public reports, this war has cost the American public as much as $37 billion in increased gas and diesel costs, or about $289 per household. The costs of this conflict are real, they are ongoing, and they will outlast the headlines. Mr. Secretary, I would appreciate an update on your efforts to mitigate this crisis.

For decades, defense programs have represented a substantial portion of the Energy Department's budget. This year, defense activities account for more than 75 percent of the Department's total request, a significant increase from recent years. That growth, though, reflects

a genuine increase in mission demands. This Committee will want to understand how the Department is managing the growth.

At the start of this Administration, NNSA had approximately 2,000 trained nuclear personnel supporting Pentagon requirements. These experts are exceedingly hard to recruit and retain. However, last year the Trump administration dismissed hundreds of these experts. In fact, I was at T.F. Green International Airport in Providence and a young lady came up to me and said, "Well, sir, I was working at NNSA a week ago, and I was dismissed. I got a call last night to get back as quickly as possible because they could not continue to secure the materiel at the site I was working at." So it was done hastily and not done well. And this is in the face of where your workload is growing.

I think it was not the right approach, and at the wrong time. And I want to understand who made that decision. Also, what it cost in lost production time, and what are you doing right now to rebuild for the future. Our Federal workers are not just overhead costs. They are the backbone of our nuclear deterrent.

Turning to the issue of plutonium pit production, I am encouraged by the progress at Los Alamos National Laboratory, which appears to be on track to reach its

production goals of 30 plutonium pits per year. However, Savannah River National Laboratory remains an open question. I understand the facility is preparing to submit a final cost projection, potentially in the range of $20 billion, and to begin production in the early 2030s. That is an enormous investment with considerable schedule risk, and if you could I would love an update on the production challenges and your efforts to reduce costs.

Earlier this week the Navy released a proposal to build 15 so-called Trump-class battleships and to make these ships nuclear powered. Powering an entire fleet of large-scale battleships with nuclear reactors will drain our highly enriched uranium reserves and force the Department to accelerate the large scale-up of a centrifuge enrichment facility. Further, if these battleships are intended to carry nuclear-armed cruise missiles, as has been reported, the NNSA would face increased warhead production demands, which it is already struggling to meet. These proposals deserve scrutiny, and I would ask for a very thorough update today.

President Trump will meet with President Xi in the next few hours. I suspect the question of whether to resume nuclear testing may arise. And I want to be clear that the NNSA administrator and the directors of our National Laboratories have consistently certified, for 25

consecutive years, that we do not need to resume nuclear testing on technical grounds. Indeed, the National Ignition Facility at Lawrence Livermore Laboratory has now successfully demonstrated the capability it was built for, simulated underground test conditions that no other country on Earth can replicate. This is a genuine achievement by NNSA, and you should be very proud of it. I would like to understand the full significance of those efforts and your views on nuclear testing, in general.

Finally, Mr. Walsh, the issue of environmental cleanup remains a difficult challenge. For example, the Hanford nuclear site has 55 million gallons of radioactive waste in aging tanks, and a legal obligation to begin high-level vitrification, converting this waste into glass for permanent disposal. The State of Washington is watching and so is this Committee. These clean-up commitments were made to local communities that did not choose to host nuclear production sites more than 80 years ago, but have paid the cost ever since. And I would appreciate an update on your Department's effort.

Thank you again to our witnesses, and I look forward to your testimonies. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Wicker: Thank you, sir. And Secretary Wright, are you ready for your opening statement?

Secretary Wright. Yes, sir.

Chairman Wicker: Then you are recognized, sir. Welcome.

STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE CHRISTOPHER A. WRIGHT, SECRETARY OF ENERGY

Secretary Wright: Thank you. Chairman Wicker, Ranking Member Reed, and members of the Committee, it is an honor to appear before you today as Secretary of Energy to discuss the President's fiscal year 2027 budget request for the Department of Energy, as it pertains to the National Nuclear Security Administration and the Office of Environmental Management.

Under President Trump's leadership we are securing peace through strength. I am proud to say NNSA is restoring its overriding mission focused on deterrence, urgency, and production, while working hand-in-hand with the Office of Environmental Management to make substantial progress in advancing the critical clean-up of nuclear waste.

The surest way to prevent nuclear war is to ensure America's strength is never in doubt. Here is what that looks like in practice. At NNSA we are strengthening America's nuclear deterrent. Today, NNSA is delivering more new nuclear weapons and plutonium pits than at any time since the Cold War. We are executing seven major warhead modernization programs concurrently, an unprecedented undertaking that ensures every leg of the triad remains safe, secure, and effective.

Every NNSA warhead modernization program is ahead of schedule. Last year, NNSA delivered the last unit of the B61-12 nuclear gravity bomb, extending service life by at least 20 years. NNSA produced the first B61-13, nearly a year ahead of schedule. We finished the first production unit of a key W84 warhead component 18 months early. NNSA completed the final unit of the W88 Alt 370 in December, a multiyear effort to modernize the warhead carried aboard our ballistic missile submarine.

We are rebuilding the industrial base that underpins our deterrent. Production of new plutonium pits at Los Alamos National Laboratory has surged, with a goal to produce 100 pits by the end of the Trump administration. We are accelerating production of uranium components, high explosives, and other critical weapons materials.

We are making breakthroughs in the science that underpins our stockpile. Last year, the National Ignition Facility achieved fusion ignition multiple times, including a record 8.6 megajoules in one shot. No other country has achieved ignition even once.

NNSA is reducing nuclear and radiological threats. Since the beginning of the Trump administration, NNSA removed cesium irradiators from five more U.S. states, reducing dirty bomb risk. The Nuclear Emergency Support Team, NEST, conducted 360 operations, trainings, and

exercises, at home and abroad, to strengthen defenses against nuclear threats.

We are advancing American energy dominance through nuclear leadership. NNSA produced 325 kilograms of high-assay, low-enriched uranium, or HALEU, and provided it to the Office of Nuclear Energy for powering advanced reactor projects. Recently, NNSA secured a record 1.7 metric tons of HALEU from Japan, the largest single international uranium shipment in NNSA history.

Thanks to President Trump's leadership, America's nuclear renaissance is here. We are delivering real results in the Office of Environmental Management. We are cleaning up nuclear waste in communities that shouldered the weight of America's earliest nuclear programs, work that helped win World War II and the Cold War. That mission continues today, with a renewed focus on transforming these sites into engines for the energy and technologies of the future. In Ohio, we are transforming the historic Portsmouth Gaseous Diffusion site into a powerful hub that will create thousands of jobs and drive long-term innovation and investment in the community.

In closing, NNSA and the Office of Environmental Management work every day to protect our nation and strengthen our security. I am honored to support these missions and the extraordinary men and women behind them.

Together we will keep America safe. Thank you.

[The joint prepared statement of Secretary Wright, Mr. Williams, and Mr. Walsh follows:]

Chairman Wicker: Well thank you, Secretary Wright. And I understand the other two gentlemen will not make opening statements. Is that correct? All right.

Well, let me begin by -- well, thank you very much for your statement and for all of your accomplishments. But I do want to ask about the matter I referred to in my opening statement, and that is the specific language that we put in the last NDAA and sent to the President. We provided funded through reconciliation to accelerate the development of the nuclear sea-launched cruise missile, but this funding was not applied as directed. Instead, the Department proposes to use these funds to avoid paying for the base program in its latest budget request. That is contrary to statutory intent, Secretary Wright.

Who made that decision, and what specifically is being done to rectify that mistake?

Secretary Wright: Let's try to clarify it. I am not sure there is a disagreement or a difference of opinion here, but I want to make sure we get it correct, because the appropriations and the directions come from you. We view that sea-launch cruise missile program as one of the top priorities in our NNSA. We are hard busily at work at it. We intend to deliver it ahead of schedule and certainly well before the warhead it will attach to. Activity has continued on that at pace.

We did not request funding in fiscal year 2027 because we have carryover funding and funding from the Working Families Tax Cut that looks able to fund our continued, high-paced efforts beyond fiscal year 2027. And I do not know if Administrator Williams want to comment, as well, but we are fully aligned with you on the critical nature of this program and want to do everything we can to expedite progress.

Chairman Wicker: I would be happy for Secretary Williams to address this.

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The Secretary has described this correctly. The W80-5 warhead for the SLCM-N platform directly evolved from the recently completed W80-4. So there is just significant learnings that we had in a previous weapon system that we have been able to apply to the SLCM-N warhead, in partnership with our Navy partners through the Nuclear Weapons Council.

So we are really moving out at pace, and they will not be waiting on us for a warhead. And as the Secretary described, we have sufficient funds to carry out all of the critical missions, with urgency, on the SLCM-N project through 2027, and have resumed, in the out years, to complete that.

Chairman Wicker: Well, thank you. People of goodwill can disagree, but at pace is not what the statute calls

for. It says, quote, "accelerate the development, procurement, and integration of the warhead for the nuclear armed sea-launch cruise missile," unquote. In other words, pick up the pace that you had planned for and speed it up, and use the money as appropriated for that purpose. Let's agree we will visit about that, and Mr. Secretary, I appreciate the spirit in which you answered that question, but it does not seem to us that we are getting what we asked for.

I bet we can agree, though, Mr. Secretary, that NASA Stennis Space Center hosts multiple Federal agencies and would be a good place to look at for the potential benefits of bringing reliable nuclear power to that Federal city. What do you say to that?

Secretary Wright: Oh, absolutely. Any time you have a nuclear facility of such quality of that, you have the workforce, you have nuclear authorizations, those are absolutely the kind of facilities that are critical to relaunching the renaissance of commercial nuclear power -- workers, technologies, facilities, in a community that is already accepted and permitted for nuclear activities. So I agree that can be a great launch pad and work area for the next generation of nuclear power.

And I also want to say, Mr. Chairman, we want to work with you and engage immediately on this SLCM-N issue. We

want to follow your requests and your funding and the plan that is there. We share your urgency on the SLCM-N project, and let's meet and get together and figure out the way to deliver fully to your satisfaction.

Chairman Wicker: Good. Well, I appreciate the spirit of that answer. With regard to the nuclear at Stennis, there are going to be some regulatory barriers that have inhibited a prompt development, so I hope that you can work with us to eliminate some of these barriers.

Secretary Wright: Let's do that. We will address that together.

Chairman Wicker: Thank you, sir. And I now recognize my friend and colleague, Senator Reed.

Senator Reed: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, gentlemen. I mentioned in my opening remarks the great success you are seeing at Los Alamos in pit production -- congratulations on that effort, all of you -- though Savannah River is still not up to scale and completed. The estimate is $20 billion. We need to get a detailed estimate and detailed schedule. Can you provide that, Secretary Wright?

Secretary Wright: Ranking Member, we share your concern about the Savannah River pit production, the slow progress, and the rather high budget estimates we have seen so far. I will soon turn it to Administrator Williams, but

we are passionate about better engineering, better designing, figuring out how to deliver that facility in a timely fashion, at a reasonable budget that is responsible use of the taxpayer funds, and to get up to pace on pit production at our second facility. We share your historical concerns with that. I think we have the team in place and the urgency and a place to address it.

Senator Reed: Secretary Williams.

Mr. Williams: Ranking Member, thank you for the question. Just recently, the Savannah River site has been turned over to NNSA from EM, and that is more than symbolic, sir. That is a signal that it has gone from a shutdown agenda over many decades to a growth agenda and critical to the plutonium mission. We are moving out on the SRPPF. We are rebidding the contract because we agree with you that the timeline and the budget is not acceptable. Twenty billion is not an acceptable number. And we will be providing more information as those bids and conversations with contractors come together this summer.

But we are reevaluating the requirements from a bottom-up, top-down approach. I know that sounds like a cliché, but we have this urgency, and we need that, for the plutonium mission, for the plutonium pits mission. So believe me, it is extremely high priority for us.

Senator Reed: Thank you very much, and please, keep

us well informed on both schedule and cost.

Secretary Walsh, welcome. Hanford you are in the process of cleaning up. You started to vitrify waste into glass, and thank you for that. The other thing you are doing is essentially pouring grout into the waste and solidifying it. One issue I think is of much concern to many of us here is, are you committed to guarantee that this grout be disposed outside of the state of Washington before you go ahead and engage?

Mr. Walsh: Yeah, thank you for that question, Ranking Member. Absolutely. Last year, as you know, in October, the DFLAW vitrification plant finally came online, 25 years in the making, almost $17 billion spent on that. But unfortunately technology and science has progressed faster than the construction, and we now know that grouting is much faster, better, safer, and less expansive, 1/20th of the cost of vitrification of low-activity waste.

At Savannah River we are treating about 9 million gallons a year of very similar tank waste, from the extraction of plutonium from uranium. So we have a great example there, and the plan is a dual glass-plus-grout approach that is going to shave decades off the clean-up mission at Hanford and save tens of billions of dollars. And that grout will be safely grouted and shipped offsite and disposed at a near-surface repository.

Senator Reed: Thank you. I think the word that describes your efforts is "essayons"?

Mr. Walsh: Essayons. Let us try.

Senator Reed: Secretary Wright, a final question. We are in the midst of an explosion of energy costs. Were you or your Department called in to provide insights or advice on the effects of the operations in the Persian Gulf before they were undertaken?

Secretary Wright: Ranking Member, yeah, I am in close contact and consultation with the President since the day I was sworn into this job. So we discuss Iran, the Middle East, energy quite regularly, all the time.

Senator Reed: It is really impolite to ask for your private discussions with the President, but you were certainly aware of the potential for disruption of the oil trade. Is that fair?

Secretary Wright: The whole administration was well aware of that risk.

Senator Reed: Thank you. And now what do you think we can do, or should do, to try to mitigate the impact on working homes throughout the country?

Secretary Wright: Yeah. Obviously ending a decades-long nuclear program in Iran is a prickly and tricky endeavor, as we are all seeing right now. One way or the other, the United States will reestablish the free flow of

energy trade through the Strait of Hormuz. But virtually every nation in the world is aligned on this endeavor, and most particularly, all of the Gulf states, all of the neighbors are aligned in this and this endeavor, as well. So it will get done, either in an agreement, in a deal with Iran, or without a deal with Iran.

Senator Reed: Thank you, Mr. Secretary. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Secretary Wright: Thank you, Senator.

Chairman Wicker: Thank you. I now recognize the Chair of the Strategic Subcommittee, my friend, Senator Fischer.

Senator Fischer: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Secretary Wright, welcome. Looking at your total budget request for the Department of Energy, it is at $54 billion. Is that correct?

Secretary Wright: Yes.

Senator Fischer: And I believe my numbers are correct that 65 percent of that will go to NNSA, and it would increase that total to 75 percent of your budget if you include the clean-up site. Is that correct?

Secretary Wright: Yes. Those are our two biggest categories, certainly, the nuclear stockpile and environmental management.

Senator Fischer: Right. As we are looking at the

budget increase, can you explain why the additional funds are necessary for NNSA as it transitions from their stockpile stewardship mission to a production-focused mission, which I support?

Secretary Wright: Yeah. Thank you. Since the day we met, Senator Fischer, we have talked about the security of this country and the critical nature of it. We can never be complacent or let our guard down in maintaining security of the United States of America. At the end of the Cold War I think we are the only of the major powers that really stopped building new weapons, designing and innovating. We maintained a safe stockpile all throughout it, but we lost our mojo a bit, in designing new weapons and modernizing our weapons. And it is absolutely essential that every power in the world believes and understands that the United States has the top nuclear arsenal. We are prepared to respond to any threat in any fashion deemed appropriate by the commander-in-chief.

So yeah, now is the time to step up our efforts to modernize all of our existing stockpiles and build some new capabilities, as we have talked about. And I thank you for your supporting and your urging of us on in this all along the way.

Senator Fischer: Thank you, Mr. Secretary. Deterrence is of prime importance to this country.

Administrator Williams, the fiscal year 2026 NDAA created a Rapid Capabilities Program within the agency. In this setting, how is NNSA utilizing this program to address those emerging needs that we see?

Mr. Williams: Thank you for your question, Senator, and for your support of that. It is critical that we deter our adversaries, and we do that through production, and that is precisely how we are getting our mojo back in America's nuclear weapons enterprise, and that is best seen in the Rapid Capabilities Program. We have a couple of very significant projects that we are working on and programs to deliver new capabilities to the warfighter in absolutely record time. We are doing business completely differently. These are cross-functional teams. We just say that we lock them in a room and they can come out when they deliver weapons.

Senator Fischer: Great. Thank you.

Mr. Williams: It is not far from that.

Senator Fischer: As we look at the successes that the agency had in 2025, such as accelerating the delivery of the B61-13, what lessons did you learn from that and what opportunities do you think we have in the future in order to accelerate those programs, Administrator?

Mr. Williams: I think the Secretary said it best in his opening statement -- a focus on deterrence, urgency,

and production. The stewardship mission was a tremendous success, and from it we have this tremendous capability of compute resources that allow us to go faster into the future.

I would just say that we are moving out at pace, changing the culture of NNSA more than anything around this production mission. I always say that culture eats strategy for breakfast, and I think you will find, at NNSA, that it is revitalized around that mission.

Senator Fischer: You know, when we look at the pit production, which lapsed at the end of the Cold War, it has been a longstanding concern of this Committee, how do we ramp that back up. And I was encouraged when I visited Los Alamos a year ago. But I would say to you, what progress can we make there and what is the NNSA's plan to reach that requirement of at least 80 pits per year?

Mr. Williams: And I can provide more information in the closed portion of the hearing.

Senator Fischer: Do you feel positive about where we are headed?

Mr. Williams: I am very positive. Under President Trump's and Secretary Wright's leadership, we are going to achieve production numbers of plutonium pits that are multiples of anything that were expected or projected this year and in subsequent years. I would just say that we are

moving out in ways that really no one thought was possible, and we are executing on that mission. I look forward to telling you more about it in closed session.

Senator Fischer: Thank you for your work. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Fischer. Senator Blumenthal.

Senator Blumenthal: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you all for being here today and for your service.

Secretary Wright, I noted on Sunday that you said you were open to suspending the Federal gas tax. Since then President Trump has indicated he will support the idea, which Senator Kelly and I introduced in the Gas Price Relief Act some 2 months ago, lowering prices by temporarily suspending the 18.4 cent per gallon tax through October 1. Do you support that idea?

Secretary Wright: I am certainly supportive of all ideas that can lower energy prices for Americans. I spent my whole life --

Senator Blumenthal: This is one that the President supported. I assume you do.

Secretary Wright: Everything has tradeoffs. I think it is a good idea. I think it has got some positive things. But it has got some tradeoffs, as well.

Senator Blumenthal: Well, I am not going to press

you, but I am surprised that you are somewhat equivocal on the idea. And let me ask you, because I believe strongly that suspending the gas tax ought to be combined with a big oil windfall profits tax, which I have championed with Senator Whitehouse. As you well know, Big Oil is raking in bonanza profits. Shell announced just Friday that it has reported a $7 billion profit in the latest quarter, which is double the previous quarter. That is emblematic of what big oil companies are making as a result of the war. Don't you think it is time that companies like Shell put some of that money back in consumers' pockets?

Secretary Wright: The oil and gas industry has had a rough couple decades. The shale revolution has been tremendous for America and American consumers and global consumers.

Senator Blumenthal: Well, should some of the windfall profits go back to consumers? Yes or no.

Secretary Wright: If you raise taxes when we need production to rise, you will get less production and ultimately higher prices. So incentives are what drives --

Senator Blumenthal: Well, they are not putting any of these profits into more production, are they?

Secretary Wright: Oh, they are.

Senator Blumenthal: They said they are not doing more production because they do not know how long the war is

going to last.

Secretary Wright: Shell, as an example, invests tens of billions of dollars every year in drilling new oil and gas wells and exploring. So if you tax something, you get less of it, and I think getting less of energy is not a good strategy. And if you look at historical records --

Senator Blumenthal: So you would oppose a windfall profits tax?

Secretary Wright: Any short-term tax like that, for a shortage of any product, is a bad idea.

Senator Blumenthal: Is there a way to assure that, for example, some of these profits go back to consumers, in particular, that the suspension of the gas tax goes back to consumers rather than to fatten the profits of big oil companies?

Secretary Wright: Suspension of the gas tax would likely flow almost entirely through to consumers, because the retailing of gasoline is a very competitive business. So if one business thought I am just going to keep that 18 cents themselves, they would lose their gasoline sales.

Senator Blumenthal: Let me switch topics, sir. Iran's enriched uranium. They have about a ton of it, which is one of the objectives of, or was, of Operation Epic Fury, that is to secure that enriched uranium. How close does that degree of enrichment enable Iranians to

develop a nuclear weapon? What amount of time would it take to do it?

Secretary Wright: Frighteningly close. They are a small number of weeks away to enrich that to weapons-grade uranium. There is still a weaponization process that happens after that, but they are quite close to constructing nuclear weapons.

Senator Blumenthal: So your testimony is that they are weeks away on that one ton of enriched uranium.

Secretary Wright: To get it to, to enrich it to weapons-grade uranium, yes, they are only weeks away.

Senator Blumenthal: And what about the other 11 tons that apparently they have?

Secretary Wright: Well, they have some 20 percent enriched uranium, and that is several more weeks behind 60 percent. And, of course, unenriched uranium, it is a long process to get it to weapons grade. But when you are at 60 percent, although the numbers do not sound that way, you are way more than 90 percent of the way there for the enrichment necessary for weapons-grade uranium. Very close. Twenty percent uranium, which they also have a lot of, is far along, as well. It is very concerning.

Senator Blumenthal: So in order to, in effect, secure or stop their enrichment, President Trump would have to go after all of the 12 tons, not just 1 ton, of uranium.

Secretary Wright: I think that is the wise strategy. Ultimately, the goal is to prevent future enrichment of uranium, as well. Yes, to have a safe world we need to end their nuclear program.

Senator Blumenthal: Thank you.

Secretary Wright: Thank you, Senator.

Chairman Wicker: Senator Rounds.

Senator Rounds: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all, thank you gentlemen for your service to our country. I also want to thank Secretary Wright for your team's support of the Sanford Underground Research Lab. We enjoyed hosting Under Secretary Gill last week for a ceremony as the facility begins construction on a facility to house the Deep Underground Neutrino Experiment's particle accelerator, and we look forward to welcoming you and Mr. Williams whenever you can make it out. We would appreciate that.

Secretary Wright and Administrator Williams, can you speak to how your offices are leveraging artificial intelligence through the Genesis Mission to solve national security problems, and what additional resources or authorities would enable you to move more quickly?

Secretary Wright: Yes. Artificial intelligence is simply a massive expansion of human capabilities. Think of a nuclear weapons design. These are exquisite and bespoke

systems. They are designed for one use and one use only. They are very technically sophisticated. Thank God the scientific prowess in our Labs has allowed us to lead the world in this area. But these are tools that are going to allow us to make things better, ultimately probably make more robust designs, and ultimately probably easier to manufacture and cheaper to make weapons. So they will add tremendously to our capabilities. That excites us.

The flip side of that is we know our adversaries, who are behind us in artificial intelligence but very active in artificial intelligence as well, they are going to do the same thing. And complacency on our end, we could cede our lead, not just in industrial space but also in the military space. Secretary Williams, our whole Department, and this Administration are resolved to not let that happen.

Senator Rounds: Mr. Williams?

Mr. Williams: Thank you for the question, Senator. The nuclear weapons enterprise has been using artificial intelligence directly in our program since 2017. This year, NNSA will spend approximately $600 million on artificial intelligence initiatives throughout our enterprise. It is a terrific complement to our high-performance computing capability, which is unique in the world, along with our physics codes and physics models. We are able to do extraordinary things for national security,

for nuclear security. This is both in the weapons design but also in the nuclear materials detection capabilities and other nonproliferation capabilities.

So we are very focused. We have extraordinary capability in our Labs at Sandia, Los Alamos, and Livermore. Some of the best scientists in the world are dedicating themselves to this national security mission at this hour, while we sit here, instead of going out into industry and certainly making more money. So it is an extraordinary effort in the Department of Energy for national security.

Senator Rounds: I think a lot of discussion since ChatGPT came about, in terms of if it is a brand-new item that is just upon us now, the reality is that a lot of our National Laboratories have been moving in this direction for a number of years, and you have been integrating this over a period of time. There is stability in that process, but it is accelerating. Can you talk a little bit about the Labs and their ability to accelerate and to keep up with the hyperscalers, or are you working in conjunction with the hyperscalers today?

Mr. Williams: That is an excellent question. For many decades, NNSA has led literally the world in high-performance computing. We have been the best customer, the leading customer. But the scale of AI is so enormous that

industry is simply going to outpace all combined U.S. government spending together. So the challenge is then reversed. We must keep pace with industry instead of setting the pace for industry, and that is a profound challenge that will require the attention of your Committee and the leadership that Secretary Wright provides.

So I would say we are very focused on that. We work closely with all of the technology companies, leading technology companies around the infrastructure. I would just say that we have very, very good and deep cooperation with our scientists at the Labs. And again, our scientists at the Labs are the best in the world. We are solving problems, one of which I will mention in the closed session, of problems that our warfighters need right now. And I will tell you more about it in the closed session.

Senator Rounds: Very good. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will yield back my 5 seconds.

Chairman Wicker: That is very generous of you. Thank you. Senator Rosen.

Senator Rosen: Thank you, Senator Rounds, for 5 seconds. Do I get to keep those, Senator Wicker?

Chairman Wicker: No, ma'am.

Senator Rosen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the witnesses for being here today. I want to get right into it, Mr. Secretary, because the Nevada National

Security Site, as we call it in Nevada, which is still the Nevada Test Site, was ground zero for the majority of the United States explosive nuclear testing from 1951 to 1992, when 100 atmospheric tests and 828 underground tests were conducted. All of us who lived in Nevada back then remember the days when the ground shook beneath us the first Saturday of every month. You would look over and say, "Oh, just a nuclear bomb going off."

Many have lost their lives because of the testing. Others bear the scars of radiation exposure to this day. Radiation exposure, the invisible enemy. And so since that time the site has done critical work to certify the reliability, safety, and effectiveness of our nuclear stockpile, but without the need for explosive testing either above or below ground.

There are new projects under construction that are going to help the site provide even greater certainty and data about the performance of the U.S. nuclear stockpile, far better data, experts say, than the information that could be gleaned if the U.S. were to, unfortunately -- and I say this, to our peril -- conduct an explosive nuclear test, as President Trump and some in his orbit have advocated. In fact, every Secretary of Energy since the Clinton administration has certified the integrity of our nuclear stockpile and certified that we do not need to

resume testing. The same has been repeatedly certified by the directors of our National Labs, multiple Secretaries of Defense under both Democrat and Republican Presidents, and all commanders of Strategic Command.

So indeed, Mr. Secretary, Administrator Williams himself told me during his confirmation hearing, and I will quote, "I would not advise testing, and I think we should rely on scientific information."

So Secretary Wright, I am going to cite your very impressive educational resume, with engineering degrees from MIT and Berkeley, and so many experts in agreement that there is no technical or strategic need to resume explosive nuclear testing. Can you commit today that this Administration will not conduct an explosive nuclear test? Yes or no.

Secretary Wright: Well, Senator Rosen, ultimately that decision comes down to the commander-in-chief.

Senator Rosen: If you were asked, what would your advice be then? Let me phrase it another way. You advise the President. Of course, any President has that right, but what would your advice be, as an engineer, as a scientist, as a Secretary?

Secretary Wright: This year, again, leaders of the weapons laboratories and the STRATCOM commander again certified our weapon stockpile as reliable. From the non-

explosive testing we do, I think our arsenal is ready to go, but there may be other reasons for which the commander-in-chief may want to engage in a nuclear test.

Senator Rosen: So you will disagree then, with your, again, extensive educational achievements and studies, and as a scientist, disagree with scientists and administrations going back to the 1990s, and the data that shows that renewed explosive testing is unnecessary? You are going to disagree with that. You think there is still a need for it. You are going to disagree with all the experts.

Secretary Wright: You are misunderstanding what I am saying.

Senator Rosen: Well, just a yes or no. Do you agree that there is a need for explosive testing or not?

Secretary Wright: To assure the reliability of our weapons, there is not a need for explosive testing.

Senator Rosen: Thank you. Administrator Williams, do you agree with the experts that it is unnecessary for the United States to resume explosive nuclear testing of any kind? I know it is not your decision. I am asking what your recommendation would be, based on the information, expert scientific information that we have, going back decades, Democrat and Republican, and independent alike.

Chairman Wicker: Mr. Secretary, state your opinion

but not what your recommendation would be.

Mr. Williams: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Senator Rosen, we conduct more than 1,000 tests on our nuclear stockpile every year. We test all kinds of components, to make sure of their reliability. I assure you that no one doubts the efficacy and quality of our weapons. I guarantee you that our adversaries have no question about how well our weapons work.

The question of testing, I think, as this hearing demonstrates, is a multidimensional problem. There is a technical component to it, and I support the Secretary's statement. But there is a geopolitical and a political component to it, as well, and all of those decisions rest in the hands of the President, as they should, because all of it relates to deterrence.

Senator Rosen: I was asking about your opinion on the science, but thank you. I am going to submit a question for the record about the NNSA funding that was zeroed out for construction. You have been down to the tunnels that verify the integrity of our nuclear stockpile. We receive no money for that due to some technical errors. I am going to send a letter to your office. Hopefully we can discuss that, because we need to continue. You have been down there. We need to continue to keep that project going and correct that technical error.

Mr. Williams: The Nevada Test Site is a great asset for the United States and our national security, and we are going to continue to make significant investments in that. It is a critical mission for our nuclear security.

Senator Rosen: Thank you.

Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Rosen. And yes, all members are encouraged to submit statements for the record. Senator Sheehy.

Senator Sheehy: Secretary Wright, good to see you. Eighty years ago America had an incredible breakthrough in physics and split the atom, and of course, one byproduct of that has been the cleanest, most unlimited source of energy in the history of mankind, that America invented, and we fielded and we pioneered. And then because Jane Fonda made a movie about it, we shelved it and we have effectively frozen out the progress of nuclear power in this country, the leading economy in the world, the most innovative country in history. We have chosen to ignore the most unlimited, cleanest source of energy in the history of mankind.

Meanwhile, China is building nuclear power plants on every street corner, every other week, as are other countries, and we are voluntarily recusing ourselves as we face a potential energy crisis -- reliable, cheap baseload power -- as AI, quantum computing, and cryptocurrency will

place unprecedented demands on our grid. We are woefully behind. What is it you are doing, what is it the broader enterprise is doing, and what can we do to make sure that we are rapidly -- not studies, not more white papers, not more discussion groups and coordination bodies -- what are we doing to rapidly start rebuilding our nuclear power infrastructure across America?

Secretary Wright: Thank you for the question, Senator Sheehy, and thank you for the eloquent statement of the situation today. As you know, I share your assessment of that. This is a tremendous energy source that we brought on the scene. We deployed it rapidly, and then we stopped decades ago. Probably before you were born we stopped meaningful movement forward on that.

Fortunately, a lot is going on well today. We have four executive orders from President Trump. We have reformed NRC, or NRC has reformed its regulatory process, internally within the organization, to make it an organization that does not stop all ideas in nuclear space. It engages and focuses on safety, safety, and safety, instead of bureaucracy, safety, and bureaucracy.

We have issued awards to restart uranium enrichment in this country, permitting and awards to start fuel fabrication back up in this country again, and we will have multiple next-generation, small modular reactors running

critical before July 4 of this year. We have brought incredible urgency to the matter, as you laid out this problem. We have been left behind. That is nonsense. This is the United States of America. We will be the leader in nuclear power and nuclear innovation in the coming decades. We are using our lands to permit reactor development on our lands. We are using our Energy Dominance Financing Office, the largest lending energy authority in the world today, to lean in to nuclear projects, with competent developers that have equity capital.

We are doing everything we can to get nuclear moving at high speed again, and I believe in the next 12 months you will see many projects break ground, under construction, and we are going to stop the nonsense and get moving with nuclear power again. And I so appreciate your support and your passionate advocacy for that cause.

Senator Sheehy: Well, I think, to your point, the DoW now is a great vanguard for that as we look at distributed power infrastructure, especially in a Western Pacific engagement. So thank you for that.

I think words have meaning, and when the AEC because the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, you know, just the name shift itself indicated we were shifting from an entrepreneurial organization focused on growth to one

focused on bureaucracy and regulation.

Mr. Williams -- Secretary Williams, sorry -- the Sentinel program is, of course, pivotal not just for the nation but my home state of Montana. Most of us would not drive 60-year-old cars to work every day. We would not put our families on 60-year-old airliners, and you certainly do not have a 60-year-old cellphone. Yet our nuclear missiles buried in the ground across our siloes are 60-year-old, sometimes older technology. There have been some interim upgrades, but fundamentally that technology is the same.

It is critical we get the Sentinel upgrade done. It is over schedule, over budget. What are we going to be doing under this admin to make sure that we are getting that program back on schedule, so we can get it done and have a credible and capable land-based nuclear deterrent?

Mr. Williams: Thank you for your question, Senator. As a fellow Navy veteran I care deeply about deterrence. The Sentinel is critical as the third leg of the triad. It is critical for our national security.

NNSA is supporting the Mk21A reentry vehicle design and keeping that on track, and keeping the weapon program, the W87-1, on track and ahead of schedule.

Several times in my leadership at NNSA there have been questions raised about, is Sentinel going to stay on track, and my message to my workforce is that I never want to hear

that question again. We are betting on the Air Force moving things to the left, and we will deliver weapons ahead of need for that program. So my commitment to you is that the Department of War will not be waiting on the Department of Energy for weapons, that we are doing everything possible to partner with them, to keep that on track. So I am optimistic about that trajectory with the Air Force.

Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Sheehy. Senator Shaheen.

Senator Shaheen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am going to defer to Senator Gillibrand, since she has to leave.

Senator Gillibrand: Thank you, Senator Shaheen. I did not know you had not already gone, so thank you.

Secretary Wright, as demonstrated by Volt Typhoon, the Chinese military is actively targeting American critical infrastructure, including power utilities and other critical infrastructure. During this time, do you think that it is important for the Federal Government to assist power utilities in keeping our grids secure?

Secretary Wright: Absolutely, Senator. Absolutely.

Senator Gillibrand: If this is important to you, the fiscal year 2027 budget cut DoE's Office of Cybersecurity, Energy Security, and Emergency Response, CESER, by 16 percent. Do you understand that the American people are

rightly concerned about these types of cuts, because this is such a priority for our security?

Secretary Wright: I think it is a serious concern and a growing concern for our security. But I think, you know, when I got into the Department it had grown massively in size and expenditures in the 4 years before I arrived, and the production of energy in the country had been squelched and prices had gone up. So just spending money does not mean better results.

We are massively focused on CESER. WE have brought great expertise into that, have had a first-class leader on it. So you are 100 percent right. It is a very important topic, and reducing budget funding does not mean a reduced concern for it. It just means we are aligning the resources we have and the partnerships we have and the progress we think we can make, and the required funding to do that.

Senator Gillibrand: Okay. If there are any problems I am going to play your answer for you, because I have deep concerns that you are not reinvesting in the gains that we had because it is such an important priority. So we are going to mark your words here, that you think you have enough money to do the very, very hard task ahead of you.

CESER has worked with the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory to launch a new AI testbed designed to help

utilities and technology providers assess and improve the security and reliability of AI models used in the energy sector. Why is it important for the government to help quantify the vulnerability of different AI models in the energy sector?

Secretary Wright: Well, because energy sector infrastructure is sort of foundational to our economy and foundational to our quality of life. If you want to destroy a society or bring them down you attack their energy infrastructure. We see Russia doing this ceaselessly every day.

So yes, again, I very much agree with your presence that AI is a powerful tool. It is going to lead to fantastic advancements. It is also going to lead to scary threats. And is our electricity grid today bulletproof? Absolutely not.

Senator Gillibrand: So how --

Secretary Wright: We have a lot of room for improvement.

Senator Gillibrand: How is CESER integrating frontier AI models into its work?

Secretary Wright: We are looking at, with frontier models, how can they both find vulnerabilities in our system and, yes, they can do that, and how can we use these same models to fix and defend against these

vulnerabilities, and hopefully in front of bad actors, whether they are state or non-state actors. But it is a very real and very serious challenge.

Senator Gillibrand: And are you using them to stay on top of vulnerabilities in both IT and OT use by power utilities?

Secretary Wright: Yes, we are.

Senator Gillibrand: And how has the decision by the Administration to bar Anthropic impacted CESER's ability to have access to all the frontier models to do this work?

Secretary Wright: Yeah. As you know, the Administration has had some serious struggles and some serious back-and-forths with Anthropic. Those continue to go on. There continues to be a dialogue and back-and-forth with Anthropic. It is a leading model and it is an important model in the world we live in today.

Senator Gillibrand: I would like to get follow-up on that, as you see how it is impacting you and whether you need more support.

DoE's Office of Environmental Management is responsible for the demolition, clean-up, and remediation of the West Valley Demonstration Project in western New York. This is the site of the only commercial reprocessing facility to recycle spent nuclear fuel in our nation's history and left legacy waste. Amazing progress has been

made with the completion of Phase 1A and the contract for Phase 1B was awarded last year to begin work on below-grade work and soil remediation. With decades of more work to be done, the authorization of the West Valley is set to expire at the end of this fiscal year.

Secretary Wright and Assistant Secretary Walsh, I have a bipartisan, bicameral bill to reauthorize West Valley. Do you both support this program, and can I have your commitment to work with me on this reauthorization?

Secretary Wright: Absolutely.

Mr. Walsh: Yeah, absolutely, and thank you for working on that, Senator Gillibrand, and also to Congressman Langworthy.

Senator Gillibrand: Thank you both. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Wicker: Senator Gillibrand, you are asking Secretary Wright to follow up on the record with a more complete answer to your question, are you not?

Senator Gillibrand: Yes, please. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Gillibrand. You owe Senator Shaheen a favor.

Senator Gillibrand: I do. Thank you.

Chairman Wicker: Senator Shaheen, you are recognized.

Senator Shaheen: Well, thank you. I will plan to

collect. And thank you all for being here.

Administrator Williams, I am going to ask you about your role as Administrator as opposed to Under Secretary. We all know that the New START Treaty has expired. However, NNSA has a long history in researching future sensor systems, to detect nuclear weapons activities that could be needed for future arms control, as well as the ability to find out what others might be doing to undermine existing arms control treaties. You were very eloquent in responding to Senator Rounds about the scientists and the expertise you have in your agency.

So can you talk about what detection research activities are occurring, why are these important, especially now as we are in a post-New START era?

Mr. Williams: Gladly. This is a key part of our deterrence strategy for the United States. A lot of attention and funding, of course, goes to what I call the offensive strategy. But you are highlighting the defensive strategy.

It takes a weapons program to find a weapons program, and that is why NNSA is uniquely suited for exactly what you describe. We provide sensors in space that look for nuclear detonations, so that we can monitor any kind of activity worldwide, and particularly over combat zones or conflict zones.

Senator Shaheen: And do you do that 24/7?

Mr. Williams: Absolutely, 24/7. And we continue to innovate and provide new capabilities that I will not discuss in this open forum. But I have been thoroughly briefed on that. That is a key part.

I want to highlight what is happening at the Nevada Test Site and the P-Tunnel. We are doing what is called decoupled testing. It is a way to enhance the sensors, the seismic sensors, so that we can detect our adversaries that might be conducting testing that is not consistent with the Test Ban Treaty. And just recently we have an experiment that sits on a scaffold, a carbon fiber scaffold. We are putting many tons of chemical explosives, not nuclear but chemical explosives, inside this cavern that we have dug in the Nevada Test Site. And later this fall we are going to be detonating that with sensors around to better calibrate our ability to find, frankly, countries that might be cheating on the Test Ban Treaty. And that is very active.

Unfortunately, we just put the concrete wall and sealed that off in preparation for our fall test. Otherwise, I would have loved to have given you a tour of it. But it is very impressive.

Senator Shaheen: Well, thank you. And I know you also monitor enrichment technology. Are you assessing where you think Iran is in terms of their enrichment

capacity, and are you weighing in with the Administration in terms of how we should be thinking about the enhanced uranium that Iran has?

Mr. Williams: We have 70,000 people in the NNSA enterprise, and I would bet that well over 1,000 of them have Ph.D.'s, particularly in physics. We know as much about enrichment as anybody on the planet, in our organization. Relating to the Iranian program, much of that collection information comes from the intelligence community. But, of course, we are the technical experts behind that analysis, and all of that is fully available to the President and his decision-makers.

Senator Shaheen: Thank you. Secretary Wright, I want to ask you a question not directly about the issues that we have been talking about here, but about your budget. Because as I understand your budget would increase defense spending at the Department of Energy by $7.2 billion, but at the same time you would cut $2.5 billion from energy program funding, with energy efficiency programs, in particular, taking a huge hit. You request zero for weatherization, even though that program saves families hundreds of dollars on their energy bills. You propose cutting the building technologies funding by 93 percent, despite the fact that buildings account for 40 percent of our energy use. In New Hampshire we pay a lot of attention

to those issues, because we are at the end of the pipeline, and we have some of the highest energy prices in the country, and the war in Iran has exacerbated all of that.

So talk to us, if you will, about how you square those cuts to successful energy efficiency programs that have really helped families in my state and throughout this country with the high energy costs, and the budget that you have proposed.

Secretary Wright: Yeah, Senator, I have spent my whole life on energy affordability, so I share your passion for that. It is just a matter of balancing what is the right role of the government in that and what is the right role in the marketplace in that.

When I arrived in the Department the regulations on energy efficiency were closing factories in the United States because their products were illegal, mostly products that low-income people can afford to buy, were not efficient enough, were not designed the way some people thought was perfect, and we were shutting out those options.

So of course we want to drive efficiency. There are economic drivers that drive devices to become more efficient. There is sometimes intelligent government regulation that can nudge that along the way. But the Department of Energy had gone so far overboard, we were

actually standing in the way of the building of energy infrastructure and other things that can ultimately drive down the cost of energy.

So I share your passion, but it is a longer discussion to be had. But thank you for raising it, Senator.

Senator Shaheen: It is, and I am out of time, but I would just point out that in New Hampshire the programs that I mentioned are really saving people money. And if we really want to push on the private sector to help government address the efficiency issues then we would be promoting performance contracting in ways that I fear the Administration is not doing. So I hope you would take a look at that.

Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Shaheen. Senator Kelly.

Senator Kelly: Thank you, gentlemen, for being here and testifying today. Secretary Wright, good to see you again. The Department of Energy is in the middle of immense change right now. You and your Department are modernizing the stockpile, restarting plutonium pit production, and sustaining the naval reactor fleet, all while supporting a growing mission set.

All of these priorities depend on a workforce made up of nuclear engineers, machinists, experts in explosive, and other highly specialized professionals to get this job

done. These people are hard to train. They are hard to hire. They are hard to retain at times. There are limited educational pipelines to find them. Many of them are retiring, and there is enormous competition in the private sector.

This workforce challenge has become more urgent following last year's workforce reductions. It is not just the number of people that you lost, it was the way it was done, and the signal that sends. When termination notices went out some personnel performing mission-critical functions and holding Q clearances were immediately stripped of access, leaving them unable to transfer ongoing projects. At the same time, others in positions not tied to immediate operational requirements retained access long after their dismissal. Secretary Wright, to me that is not a bureaucratic error. It is a fundamental error in how things were planned. And it means the people who ordered these cuts did not seem to understand the agency.

It would be helpful to understand, how did that order come to you and your department on who to cut and how many people to cut? And if it did, did you push back and conduct any sort of review, and how were these cuts carried out that resulted in the issues we are currently facing?

Secretary Wright: Yeah, thank you for the question, Senator Kelly. First of all, we have reduced the head

count at the Department of Energy to about where it was at the beginning of the Biden administration. It grew dramatically during Biden administration, and we shrunk it back down roughly to the size it was at the beginning of the Biden administration. And almost all of that, way over 95 percent, all of that was voluntary. We offered severance packages to people that wanted to take them and did not. Some people we said, "Hey, we actually can't give it to you. We need you to stay," and we would make a pitch and a sell.

So it was slow going. It was directed and driven by me. It was in different departments and different areas where we offered these packages --

Senator Kelly: But you were not told to cut these specific people.

Secretary Wright: I was not told to cut these specific people.

Senator Kelly: Were you given like a head count?

Secretary Wright: No, I was not. I was not. There was a mistake made early on, and you referenced it, and that was entirely my fault. In my first week after confirmation there was a term "provisionary employees." I rightfully took it as -- or wrongfully, wrongfully, 100 percent my fault -- I thought it was newly hired people that were in training, and there were a lot of them. We

had, you know, a bunch of people that were hired for educational promotion, and we made a broad-brush thing to remove the provisional employees. That was a mistake, and you referenced some of the impacts of it. Because "provisional" did not mean what I thought it meant. My fault.

And you could have been new in a role -- you had been at the Department for 15 years but you are newly in a role and you are considered provisional, and we lost, or we wrongly laid off a number of critical, very important people in NNSA. As soon as I realized that, which was within 24 hours, we called all of them back, and all but two came back. That was a screw-up. That was on me. We reversed that screw-up within 24 hours, but I own that screw-up. The rest of the restructuring of our department was choices also led by me. It was done slow and thoughtfully and entirely from myself and leadership within the Department.

Senator Kelly: Very well. Secretary Wright, I appreciate you taking responsibility. We do not see a lot of that from this Administration. And would just -- can I have 30 more seconds, Mr. Chairman?

Chairman Wicker: Is there objection anywhere in the room? Without objection.

Senator Kelly: I just know the value of having

nuclear scientists, you know, computational scientists, weapons technicians. We just have to be really careful, because your mission in this agency is so critical to our national security, and these folks are trained for years and years, and we have got to make sure we have got the workforce in place. So I appreciate you being candid and being accountable.

Secretary Wright: I agree with that sentiment very much. These are critical people with very specialized skills. One of the biggest jobs of the three of us here and rest at the Department behind me is to make a culture that people are proud and love to work there. Getting people fired up so they will stay in our labs, in our weapons programs, and not go to the private sector is a huge part of our job, which is why we have driven a lot of reforms in the National Labs to get rid of the bureaucracy, allow them to move quick, have more decision-making at the tip of the spear. I want to make sure that the morale at the Labs is much higher when I leave than when I arrive. I share your assessment of that, and thank you for asking those questions, Senator.

Senator Kelly: Thank you.

Chairman Wicker: I applaud the agreement between the Secretary and the Senator. Senator Banks, you are recognized.

Senator Banks: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Secretary Wright, you have been very helpful to Indiana on many fronts, and I appreciate your leadership very much.

I have championed pilot program language supporting the evaluation and deployment of small modular reactors and advanced nuclear technologies to strengthen our national security infrastructure. Crane Navy Base, in southern Indiana, is exactly the kind of strategic defense asset that could benefit from a resilient, onsite nuclear power generation. How does the Department plan to partner with the Department of the Navy on these types of SMR pilot efforts, and what advice do you have for us?

Secretary Wright: Yes. Thank you for the question, Senator Banks. And by raising Crane, you are right on the target. If you want to do something in nuclear today, get this ball moving again, almost everything that is going to happen is in places that are already nuclear. They have already had the permitting. They have some experience there. They have a workforce. They have some industrial capacity, as you do at Crane. So that is exactly the kind of locations that are best suited for new deployment of reactors. Community support, workforce, buildings, facility, a nuclear history.

Yeah, we are going to see lots of activity around the country as we restart the nuclear industry, but I am

repeating myself, but yes, the vast majority of that will be at existing facilities with a nuclear history, such as Crane. I think it is a great target.

Senator Banks: Tell us more about your interactions with the Department of the Navy. How is that relationship? How are you working together? What roadblocks exist to continue that partnership and grow it?

Secretary Wright: First of all, Navy is fantastic, truly fantastic, and I must say, probably the greatest nuclear innovation in power production, in global history, is the Navy. Admiral Hyman Rickover programmed to develop the reactors that run our submarines and run our aircraft carriers. Absolutely a phenomenal, phenomenal engineering achievement. It set a high bar of what can be achieved in the nuclear space and how to achieve it. The safety record, the operating performance of the reactors, designed by the Navy back in the '40s and '50s, just awesome.

So yeah, do Navy people appreciate and understand nuclear reactors? Absolutely. In fact, there is a reason the head of the National Nuclear Security Administration is a former Navy nuclear submariner. He gets our armed forces. He gets our services. He gets nuclear. He lived in a tube with a nuclear reactor in it for over a year. So I think Navy is an awesome partner in this area.

Senator Banks: Any advice for Crane? I understand

you recognize the vision and the importance, but before I get to Secretary Williams, any advice for Crane?

Secretary Wright: Engage directly. I always say subtlety goes over our head. And I am sure there are dialogues right now with Crane. But we should be actively engaging in them, like what is the most appropriate next step to move the nuclear ball forward at Crane. So probably there are people in our Department already actively engaged with Crane. Please confirm there is, and if there is not, if they are waiting for us to reach out, please tell them to proactively reach out. We would love to talk to them. We would love to engage with them.

Senator Banks: Thank you for that. I will make sure of that. Secretary Williams, good to see you. We served together as colleagues in the House. Crane has built nationally recognized expertise in radiation, hardened electronics, and microelectronics, to support the strategic deterrence mission. Can you discuss the importance of sustained investment in radiation, hardened technologies to ensure that the U.S. maintains its technological edge?

Mr. Williams: Yes. Thank you for the question, Senator. Nice to see you, as a fellow Navy veteran.

One of the things I would highlight about Crane, and I will get to your answer, is the importance of supply chain. We need to look, for commercial nuclear as well, we need to

look beyond just reactor designs. They have to get built. And some of those capabilities are at Crane, in support of the nuclear Navy.

In terms of hardened electronics, our nuclear weapons are made to perform and survive in the most extreme of environments, and those extreme environments include being able to penetrate a nuclear detonation and still function as planned, on time, on target, without any interruption. And hardened electronics are directly linked to that. We have extraordinary capabilities. We test them in our facilities like NIF and things that we are building down at Sandia. So it is absolutely critical.

Senator Banks: Thank you. My time has expired.

Chairman Wicker: Thank you, Senator Banks. This concludes the open portion of today's hearing. I want to thank our witnesses for their testimony. For the information of members questions for the record will be due to the Committee within 2 business days of the conclusion of this hearing.

We will commence the closed portion of this hearing in Senate Security at 5 minutes past 11. We are recessed until 5 minutes past 11.

[Whereupon, at 10:50 a.m., the open hearing recessed, to reconvene in closed session at 11:05 a.m.]