

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

February 19, 2025

The Honorable Chris Wright
Secretary
U.S. Department of Energy
1000 Independent Ave. SW
Washington, DC 20585

Secretary Wright:

We write to you with grave concerns regarding the Department of Energy's implementation of President Trump's Executive Order 14210, exacerbated by the Office of Personnel Management's (OPM) so-called "deferred resignation" scheme. Over the past week, significant workforce reductions have taken place at the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) threatening the supply of electricity to our constituents and abrogating BPA's independence. As members of the delegation representing Washington state, we believe these actions are unacceptable breaches of public trust and require your attention.

In your welcome remarks at the Department of Energy (DOE) you stated that "energy is the basic infrastructure that allows us to live great lives." You outlined nine goals for DOE during this Administration: "Number one... our goal is to advance energy addition, not subtraction." You went on to emphasize the critical importance of "strength[ening] grid reliability and security." In less than two weeks' time, DOE has undermined BPA, to the detriment of each one of these priorities.

Pursuant to President Trump's Executive Order (EO) 14210, last week DOE implemented large scale, department-wide reductions in the workforce. At the Bonneville Power Administration, these have been nothing short of devastating, totaling nearly 20 percent of BPA's total headcount. These public servants literally helped keep the lights on for tens of millions of Americans. Beyond harming BPA's ability to address existing and future needs, these cuts immediately jeopardize the reliability of the Pacific Northwest's electrical grid and severely hamper economic development in the region. Such significant reductions in BPA's workforce will result in increased costs to consumers and delays to further economic investments in the Northwest.

As you may have learned in recent weeks, BPA provides 28 percent of the Pacific Northwest's electric power, ensuring affordable electricity for more than 13 million people across Washington, Idaho, Oregon, and Western Montana. Further, BPA owns and operates 75 percent of the Northwest's high voltage electrical transmission system, amounting to over 15,000 miles of transmission lines. BPA also supports fish and wildlife conservation programs, provides cost-effective energy efficiency savings across sectors, guarantees compliance with federal reliability standards, maintains transmission rights-of-way and mitigates wildfire risks, manages billions in assets, serves as a balancing authority, and ensures new generation and load can connect to the grid. Taken in sum, the services that BPA provides support the entire region, including some of

the strongest, fastest growing state economies in the country. These services are not free—Northwest ratepayers ensure that BPA is able to remain self-funded. The Bonneville Power Administration does not receive funding from taxpayers.

Recent years have presented significant challenges for BPA, raising the specter of near-term resource adequacy constraints. Load growth has increased significantly, stemming from new manufacturing and industrial projects, major investments in data centers to drive the future of artificial intelligence, and population growth across urban centers. BPA's long-term contracts expire in 2028, posing financial risks to both BPA and the region's public utilities if not thoughtfully re-negotiated. Increasing variability in both snowpacks and precipitation are driving changes to the timing and amount of hydropower generation. BPA's highly-skilled workforce drives their ability to manage these challenges and more across the region—it is reckless to fire these experts when the stakes are this high.

In response, BPA has undertaken major initiatives to ensure continuity in the Northwest, including the Provider of Choice contract-development process, reforming interconnection policies, and modernizing and expanding the transmission system. Workforce shortages for key positions—including linemen, electricians, engineers, transmission planners, and more—have hampered BPA's ability to execute on key goals and address challenges. And while these challenges are not unique to BPA, the nature of BPA's relationship with DOE is.

Beyond those fired, hundreds of BPA employees opted in to OPM's so-called “deferred resignation” program, which will leave critical positions open without the ability to backfill easily. Both workers and ratepayers are now left without certainty on what funding will be used or when payments under this legally dubious program will begin. Encouraging resignation of these highly specialized workers alone risks grid reliability and stable rates in the region, draining BPA's institutional knowledge with no solution to account for these additional vacancies.

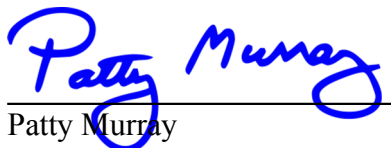
The EO also calls for further large-scale Reductions in Force (RIFs). There may also be further firings of probational employees. Additionally, the EO requires the hiring of “no more than one employee for every four employees that depart.” BPA cannot afford to follow through on such directives. The EO states that workforce reductions “shall not apply to functions related to public safety”—ensuring the reliable provision of electricity is clearly a matter of public safety. As such, we call on you to continue to swiftly rescind the terminations of staff and reverse rescinded job offers at BPA, in acknowledgement of the critical role that these employees play ensuring grid reliability in the Northwest. It cannot be stated more plainly: this is a matter of life-and-death for millions of Americans.

Last, EO 14210 calls for eliminating insularity to empower our “system of Government,” including through the potential elimination and consolidation of federal agencies. This, DOE's corresponding implementation of the EO, and OPM's “deferred resignations,” represent an unprecedented breach of BPA's independence. Forcibly firing, buying out, and rescinding job offers for employees itself undermines BPA's authority. Congress created, and has repeatedly affirmed, that BPA is a “separate and distinct” entity within DOE, providing it with the independence necessary to fulfill its missions in the Northwest. DOE has neither the expertise

nor the resources to effectively manage BPA's day-to-day operations. BPA is required to operate in a business-like manner, with significant operating and financial autonomy provided under statute. It has a responsibility to serve the Pacific Northwest at cost-based rates, and as previously noted, taxpayer dollars do not fund BPA's operations. This autonomy has enabled the stable electric marketing and transmission systems and policies that provide for the Northwest. The Bonneville Power Administration's operating decision must be made in the Northwest, for the benefit of the Northwest.

In closing, we respectfully request that you respond no later than February 25th with your plans for implementing EO 14210 as it relates to the Bonneville Power Administration, including any potential future firings, RIFs, and restrictions on hiring. We request that you recognize the critical role BPA's workforce plays for the day-to-day operations of the electrical grid in the Northwest by rescinding the terminations of BPA employees and reversing rescinded job offers. Further, we request that you explain why BPA employees were not deemed necessary to meet public safety responsibilities and exempted from last weeks' workforce reductions in the first place. We remind you that the Bonneville Power Administration was created by Congress to carry out missions that are essential to the lives and livelihoods of Americans across the Pacific Northwest.

Sincerely,



Patty Murray
United States Senator



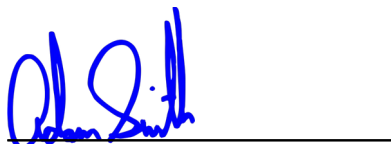
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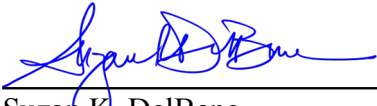
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