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**Committee:** Senate Energy & Natural Resources Committee  
**Event:** [Full Committee Hearing to Examine the President's Budget Request for the Department of Energy for Fiscal Year 2027](#)  
**Date:** April 21, 2026

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***Executive Summary:***

On April 21, 2026, the Senate Energy & Natural Resources Committee held a hearing to examine the President's Fiscal Year 2027 budget request for the Department of Energy (DOE).

- Republicans commended DOE Sec. **Chris Wright** for refocusing DOE on grid reliability, dispatchable power, and stricter oversight of the agency's loan programs.
- Democrats, by contrast, accused DOE of politically motivated project cancellations and unlawful budget cuts affecting clean energy, scientific research, and innovation programs. They also raised concerns about rising energy costs for Americans.
- Sec. Wright defended the administration's actions, emphasizing efforts to restore grid stability through increased support for natural gas, coal, and nuclear power, along with expanded liquefied natural gas (LNG) exports and critical mineral development.
- The hearing also underscored the need to accelerate permitting and strengthen workforce development to meet growing energy demand.

***Member Toplines:***

*Chair Mike Lee (R-UT)*<sup>1</sup>: Lee criticized the previous administration for prioritizing renewable energy sources, relying on fragile supply chains, and rushing large-scale funding decisions despite oversight concerns. He argued that the current DOE has begun to refocus on reliability, stronger oversight, and dependable energy generation. Lee emphasized that surging demand from data centers and electrification will require expanded dispatchable power, and he expressed interest in how new financing tools could strengthen the grid going forward.

*Ranking Member Martin Heinrich (D-NM)*: Heinrich criticized DOE under Wright's leadership, arguing that political considerations had driven funding cancellations that disproportionately affected Democratic-led states. He said the department's budget cuts and program eliminations would raise energy costs, undermine innovation, and weaken efforts to expand affordable energy sources. Heinrich also accused DOE of obstructing congressionally approved consumer savings programs and misusing authority to subsidize uneconomic fossil fuel plants, increasing costs for consumers.

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<sup>1</sup> The opening remarks of Chair Lee and Ranking Member Heinrich were not available at the time of this memo's distribution.

## ***Witness Toplines:***

[Chris Wright, Secretary of Energy, Department of Energy](#): Wright argued DOE's budget restored focus on reliability, affordability, and energy security while correcting what he described as prior political mismanagement. He emphasized actions to strengthen grid reliability, expand LNG exports, modernize nuclear capabilities, and scale domestic energy production of dispatchable energy sources. Wright also highlighted investments in advanced technologies, critical minerals, the Genesis Mission, and restructuring federal financing to prioritize projects that enhance grid capacity and energy independence.

## ***Major Takeaways:***

- Heinrich highlighted high energy prices and criticized DOE for forcing utility customers to pay for the coal plants kept open through administrative actions. He also questioned the legal authority to redirect carbon capture funds to subsidize coal plants.
  - Wright argued that keeping coal plants online prevented deadly blackouts during recent winter storms. He maintained that the redirected funds are legally being used to enhance coal plant operations and that gas prices, while high due to conflict in the Middle East, are lower than their peak under the previous administration.
  - Sen. **John Barrasso** (R-WY) asked about efforts to increase coal production. Wright affirmed that coal remains the world's most critical electricity source and is essential for meeting the energy demands of the artificial intelligence (AI) data center industry.
- Sen. **James Risch** (R-ID) praised the upcoming launch of the world's first microreactors at the Idaho National Lab. Wright agreed this marks a "renaissance" for nuclear energy, driven by private capital and the administration's deregulatory agenda.
- Sen. **Ron Wyden** (D-OR) criticized the administration for dismantling clean energy tax credits, arguing that private industry, including natural gas producers, supports technologically neutral credits to help meet rising energy demand.
  - Wright argued that the renewable energy credits and mandates distort the market and raise consumer prices. He pointed to data indicating that states with renewable portfolio standards have electricity prices 50 percent higher than states without them.
  - Sen. **Angus King** (I-ME) challenged Wright's disparagement of wind and solar, citing Energy Information Administration projections showing massive near-term capacity increases for solar, wind, and battery storage. Wright attributed renewable growth to lingering federal subsidies and asserted that once market-distorting subsidies are removed, new capital allocation will heavily favor natural gas and nuclear, though he conceded solar and storage will still play a significant role where economically viable.
- Barrasso emphasized the committee's ongoing work on permitting reform, stating that eliminating administrative barriers and providing certainty to permit applicants is a key goal.
  - Wright stated that the fundamental priority is making it easier to build "big things in America," asserting that project selection should be driven by business, not

the government. He also emphasized that reform must establish a "reasonable window" for permit timelines, guarantee certainty once a permit is issued, and rely on a bipartisan legislative consensus.

- King questioned the cancellation of fully permitted offshore wind (OSW) projects, emphasizing that developers assume immense risk and that having the government abruptly revoke permits post-financing undermines the certainty the administration claims to support. Wright defended the cancellation of OSW projects, citing national security concerns. Though he conceded the need for greater permitting certainty.
- Sen. **Dave McCormick** (R-PA) asked about permitting reform and the nuclear workforce. Wright stressed that bipartisan permitting reform is the administration's top priority to unlock private capital. He diagnosed the current slow permitting process as a result of the "weaponization" of the *National Environmental Policy Act*, which has made domestic construction arduous. Wright also acknowledged a nationwide shortage of skilled trades workers needed to build new energy infrastructure.
- Lee questioned how the newly restructured energy financing office is avoiding the ethical conflicts and rushed approvals seen at the end of the Biden administration.
  - Wright noted the previous administration obligated funds haphazardly without considering consumer costs. He stated the new office is focused on approving loans for projects that will lower energy costs for consumers.
  - King asked how the federal government plans to help de-risk the high initial construction costs of small modular reactors. Wright revealed a plan to partner with hyperscaler technology companies and use DOE loans to build a fleet of 10 reactors, spreading the financial risk.
- Sen. **Alex Padilla** (D-CA) accused the DOE of cutting the Office of Science's budget and illegally denying California funding for the ARCHES hydrogen hub due to political bias.
  - Wright denied political motivations, stating the ARCHES hub was denied due to high costs and a lack of pipeline infrastructure. He also clarified that the Office of Science budget was not cut, but rather reorganized to separate AI and quantum computing into their own line items.
- Sen. **Lisa Murkowski** (R-AK) raised concerns about a 78 percent budget cut in hydropower. Wright clarified that hydropower funding was not cut but moved into a new "base load power" budget category.
- Sen. **Bill Cassidy** (R-LA) asked if DOE's National Labs could measure the emissions intensity of foreign manufacturing to support a proposed fee to heavily polluting countries like China.
  - Wright agreed that DOE has the capability and supported the concept to prevent the offshoring of American jobs.
- Sens. Barrasso and **Tom Cotton** (R-AR) both asked about securing domestic supply chains for critical minerals like rare earth elements and lithium.
  - Wright emphasized the administration's whole-of-government effort to break China's monopoly by expediting permits for domestic mining and processing facilities.