



Savannah River Site Watch

November 19, 2024
Columbia, South Carolina

**Statement of Tom Clements, Director SRS Watch, on Nomination
of Chris Wright as DOE Secretary**

Based on the video I have seen of Mr. Chris Wright expressing his ignorance about climate change and the dramatic shift to cleaner energy that is taking place, I can only conclude that he appears to be unqualified to become the next secretary of the Department of Energy.

It is shocking to view [the video](#) of Mr. Wright coming out as an ill-informed and unbridled fossil-fuel apologist. Let's be honest about the fact that he ignores scientific facts and proudly but wrongly asserts that there is no climate crisis and no such thing as dirty energy. It's easy to see that his worldview is distorted by the fact that he runs a large fossil fuel company that has placed profiting off weak U.S. regulations and high oil prices and peak oil production as his number one goal.

He has a long ways to go to be educated about the reality of today's energy scene in the United States so we'll see if he chooses to open his eyes and see the bigger picture. It is baffling that he seems to be unaware of information from Energy Information Administration that new [electricity generation capacity added in 2024](#) is, by far, made up of solar, battery storage and wind with natural gas and nuclear trailing far behind. The energy transition is being undertaken by U.S. industry which Mr. Wright ignorantly mocks. That the energy transition is irreversible has obviously struck fear in the very being of Mr. Wright and instead of resisting he should support this amazing trend.

If Mr. Wright becomes the secretary of energy, he must first resign from Liberty Energy and also step down from the board of Oklo, Inc. a company that is pushing a highly speculative nuclear reactor design that poses an unacceptable nuclear proliferation risk. The fuel that the Oklo design would eventually must be rejected as it would consist of weapon-usable plutonium extracted from highly radioactive spent fuel by a dirty reprocessing technique.

Confirmation hearings for Mr. Wright must delve deeply into his inaccurate views about U.S. energy production and trends and also focus on nuclear matters relevant to DOE's [Savannah River Site](#) in South Carolina. As his knowledge level about SRS, including its growing role in nuclear weapons production, may well be low, I would be glad to help educate him from a public-interest perspective. Key SRS issues that should be discussed in a confirmation hearing include:

1. The priority at SRS must be on cleanup of the dangerous high-level nuclear waste tanks and keeping DOE accountable to meet [the stated 2037 goal](#) by which all tanks would be closed. An emphasis of nuclear weapons projects at SRS will detract from the urgent site cleanup that is needed and diverts precious financial resources away from the cleanup mission. Mr. Wright should make a pledge before the Senate not cut corners in cleanup at SRS or any other DOE site and pledge to work to secure funding to get the job done.
2. DOE has been wrongly and tenaciously focused on making SRS a key part of the new nuclear arms race – via the proposed construction of a facility to make the plutonium cores of new nuclear weapons. Mr. Wright has an amazing opportunity before him: to help the incoming president take decisive steps to end the budding nuclear arms race with China and Russia and negotiate significant long-lasting cuts in all nuclear stockpiles. Recalling efforts by President Regan with the Soviet Union in 1985 to eliminate all nuclear weapons, Mr. Wright could help deliver a “Ronald Reagan moment” to the new president by supporting dramatic, multilateral nuclear arms reductions. A pledge to [reassess any perceived need for a SRS Plutonium Processing Facility](#), estimated to cost up to a staggering \$25 billion (p. 271 in [NNSA’s FY 2025 budget request](#)) would be welcome from budgetary and nuclear disarmament perspectives.
3. Mr. Wright should pledge to greatly expand public participation in DOE decision making, which is at all all-time low. He must restore confidence by the public in DOE and reverse the trend under Biden to ignore public stakeholders. As part of this “restoration of public confidence effort,” the ability of DOE to fully and quickly handle [Freedom of Information Act \(FOIA\) requests](#) must be tackled from day one.
4. Mr. Wright should strongly affirm that SRS will not be turned into a storage facility for highly radioactive spent nuclear fuel from commercial reactors. Designation of SRS as a spent fuel site would not only hamper the urgent cleanup mission but also potentially result in a significant new radioactive burden that would pose a threat to public health and safety and the environment. Eliminating the nuclear waste threats at SRS must have top priority and that means not bringing commercial nuclear waste into the site, which Mr. Wright should affirm.

SRS Watch (<https://srswatch.org/>) is celebrating a successful 10 years of advocacy for sound nuclear policies: <https://srswatch.org/srs-watch-celebrates-10-years-of-public-interest-advocacy-for-the-environment-nuclear-nonproliferation/>